

Parlor, Bedlam and Bath

PARLOR,
BEDLAM AND
BATH

S·J·PERELMAN
AND
Q·J·REYNOLDS

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CHAPTER I

The foundling on the priory steps - In which an ankle is sprained and a question asked - A pitcher is sent to the well and traded to the Braves - The long arm of coincidence rears its ugly head and in its hand is a hammer - An inkling about the foundling.

LUKE and Mameluke Tattersall were born just about the time the Methodist Church was beginning to realize that a new invention of the devil, the Waltz, needed legislation, and General Grant Five-Cent Perfectos were being worn like cartridges across the chests of ward-heelers. Luke and Mameluke were born of the same mother, and, as far as any one in St. Louis ever knew, of the same father. That was all they ever had in common. Luke spent most of his boyhood hanging the turkey from fences and wolfing the romances of

Old Cap Collier. Mameluke was the kind of boy who was always ready to make up a fourth hand at jacks with the girls. At eleven he already possessed documents proving that he had not missed Sunday School for seven years.

Fulfilling his early promise, Mameluke grew up physically, if not mentally. He made a "good" marriage, taking to wife the only daughter of a wealthy manufacturer of surveying instruments named Plott. The lucky lady was unfortunately not very bright, and her face, even in animation, perilously resembled a stuffed olive. She was, however, a Good Girl and had been saving herself for her husband, just as Mameluke had been saving himself for her. They settled down in Plottville, the home of the Plott Surveying Works, and Mrs. Mameluke Tattersall covered the pillows in her husband's den with the flags of all nations. In due time she passed to her eternal reward and Mameluke hung a brace of cat-tails over her crayon portrait in the parlor. And not long afterward Mameluke awoke one morning to find that his father-in-law also had given up, and that he was now master of all he surveyed.

His brother Luke, on the other hand, was less fortunate. He had started as a printer's apprentice on the St. Louis "Star-Eagle" and had drifted into the class of floaters known as journeymen printers. Somewhere in his wanderings he had picked up the art of reporting, which was an art indeed in those dim days before we had rule by Tabloid. But Luke's feet were beginning to go back on him as a result of long days spent standing on them in composing-rooms, and he forsook printing to take up the career which was not to make him famous, that of sports writing.

He was, as sports writers went in those days—and sports writers went a good deal—not bad. He even achieved a measure of fame around Milwaukee for his reports of fights and ball games. His great moment, and the climax of his career as gentleman of the press, came when he was sent to cover the Sullivan-Corbett fight in New Orleans. Sullivan had always been Luke's idol. As he watched that cool left hand of Corbett's darting again and again to John L's nose and eyes, Luke felt as if he were taking every blow. He was crying by the end of the twentieth round. At the end

of the thirtieth frame he was in agony. When the end came and the noblest Roman of them all lay huddled on the canvas, a grotesque hulk, Luke slipped out of the arena and sent his paper a six-word message. It read: "There is no story. Sullivan lost."

A few weeks later, after Luke's drunk had worn off, Sally Prentice, a waitress in the Andrew Jackson Oyster Bar in New Orleans, caught him on the rebound from the Sullivan fight, and before he could collect his wits had married him. Sally had convinced herself that she had what was called "a weak chest" and constantly took amber-colored medicine in flat black bottles which were then sold openly to sufferers at corner hospitals. The pair led a remarkably happy married life, for soon Sally had convinced him that he too had her complaint and they had many good times over their medicine. But natural forces move on inevitably, and before long a stork delivered a C. O. D. bundle named Chester Tattersall to the not-too-exuberant parents.

As soon as Sally was decently convalesced, she insisted on celebrating the unusual event in the

usual way. The Tattersalls gave a party chiefly distinguished by intensive application to the chest medicine. But poor Sally died from an overdose of the specific. The medium was a drop from their flat on the third story of the house to the court. Sally had left the party to look at the stars from the window and had sailed like a graceful feather to the ground. When little Chester had suddenly awakened and exercised a baby's chief prerogative—that of crying for his milk—the curious revelers found Sally wrapped around the flag-stones looking like a very pretty little girl who had fallen out of the window. She was quite dead and so, after a unanimous vote, a burial resolution was passed.

Luke resumed his old life as journeyman printer and little Chester spent the next five years in the care of boarding-house keepers. But again Luke's feet went back on him, and remembering his brother Mameluke, he packed his few belongings and headed for Plottville. Mameluke, he found on his arrival, had become almost indecently prosperous; the plant had expanded, and Mameluke chaperoned his brother through its various depart-

ments with a fat smugness which his brother found nauseating. Only once was Luke moved from his boredom. This was when Mameluke explained that the horizontal and vertical lines his brother saw when he looked through a transient were really spider webs.

"Silk and cotton threads," announced Mameluke, "are affected by the weather. They shrink. They bend. They warp." He paused impressively. "But not spider webs. They are not only thinner; they are the thinnest thread possible. However, we in the surveying instrument business are hampered because it is impossible to get enough of them for this purpose."

Mameluke, generous from boyhood, gave Luke and Chester a small cottage hard by the Works which was reputed to be haunted by ghosts and therefore useless to him. Since Luke had saved only enough to feed himself and the five-year-old boy for six months, the future did not look especially rosy. A view of the cottage only added to his gloom. He stood in the dusty kitchen of the cottage cursing his aching feet and wondering what was in future for him. Suddenly he was star-

tled to hear his pride and joy emit a loud shriek from the attic. Investigation proved that Chester had been bitten by a spider. The attic, Luke found, was infested with spiders. It was, to mint a phrase, a spider's paradise. In other words, there were a great many spiders in the attic.

"There is a shortage of spider webs," reasoned Luke. "Good. Why not raise spiders, collect their webs, and sell them to Mameluke?"

He took the idea to Mameluke. The latter was only mildly enthusiastic.

"Spiders," affirmed Mameluke, "will not breed in captivity."

"A minor objection," said Luke, "I won't let them know they are in captivity."

And he was as good as his word. Luke learned to roll up the spider webs without even bending the delicate thread. The best part of it all was that he could do this while sitting down. He simply wound one end of the web around a stick and waited for the enraged spider to begin spinning away in the opposite direction. When the spider was finally exhausted Luke would have a neat roll of web ready for use.

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Chester meanwhile was growing up with little or no encouragement. His regular school lessons were supplemented by his father's stories of early St. Louis, New Orleans, and Mississippi. He also was taught a vigorous dislike of Corbett by the elder Tattersall, who kept prophesying the early downfall of the dancing master.

Then came the news that Corbett was to meet a lanky challenger named Fitzsimmons at Carson City. Luke bestirred himself. He went here and there borrowing what he could; a hundred dollars here, fifty there. When he had collected all that was possible, he left Plottville without a word. Arrived in Carson City, his instinct told him that Fitzsimmons would knock out Corbett in fifteen rounds, and he soon found takers for his bets. And when Gentleman Jim was lying in his room in the Carson City Hotel dully rubbing his solar plexus and listening to the shouts of the crowd hailing Fitzsimmons, Luke was bounding about collecting four thousand five hundred dollars, the fruit of his instinctive choice of the speckled marvel.

Now for once Luke proved himself a real father.

Allegretto

His first act on returning to Plottville was to deposit all but two or three hundred dollars in the bank under Chester's name. He was determined that Chester must have a college education when the time came. In the years that followed, Luke now and then made small deposits to the account, and by the time Chester had leaped somewhat heavily over the preparatory barrier of high school, the sum had grown to eight thousand dollars.

Luke escorted Chester as far as Milwaukee and saw him off to a large Eastern university. Its name is unimportant; it has since been torn down to make way for an abattoir. The elder Tattersall shook hands with his son, gave him one or two useful hints which had nothing to do with his studies, and headed with a sigh of relief into the nearest barroom. His feet were aching abominably. After six drinks of King William they felt much better. After sixteen he had forgotten that he even had feet. He walked out of the barroom without realizing that he was walking, especially out of a barroom. A taxicab turned the corner and Luke with gay insouciance advanced on it. The cab got the better of it, and three weeks later Chester re-

ceived a letter from Uncle Mameluke apprising him of his father's surrender. The letter stated that there had been no indecent complications such as arising from the dead and that Chester was now sole heir to the round sum of eight thousand dollars.

After Chester's grief was slightly assuaged, he realized that he had a sufficient sum to finish his college career, besides a relative who was far from poverty-stricken. He settled down to an intensive existence of applied drinking unmarred by study except before examinations. In his third year, on his first visit to Plottville since he had left for college, his uncle showed him through The Works and informed Chester that on graduating he might be prepared to return to Plottville and climb the ladder of success, bracing his feet on the bottom rung. He also mixed several similes, asserting that great oaks from little acorns grow, that the race is not always to the swift, and that genius is the name given by the unwise to applied perspiration. He neglected, however, to mention that he had read these maxims in a set of Samuel Smiles' works

for which he had forgotten to send the balance in thirty days.

Chester waited until his uncle was through and then informed Mameluke that he had other plans, although they were as yet hazy. There then ensued the traditional scene in which an irate uncle is defied by a young heir and the irate uncle turns purple and says in a loud voice, "I will cut you off without a cent." Unfortunately for the effect of his speech, Chester calmly told him to make it louder and funnier, whistle the patter, and trust in the Lord for his soul's salvation. And packing his military hair brushes and the other clean shirt in his Gladstone, he turned his face once more toward the East and his last year.

When the first spasms of rage had worn off, Mameluke wrote his nephew several conciliatory letters, an outgrowth of the secret envious admiration he had always borne toward Chester's father. Chester remained unmoved and graduated without honors. His uncle, still hoping that Chester would one day change his mind, sent him a pair of boot-trees which Chester immediately committed

to memory and a Bible which served admirably to hold his patent-leather shoes in shape.

THE traffic department of the New York Telephone Company was not the most exciting place in the world. Twenty-three dollars and fifty cents had to be spread thinly to cover laundry, room rent, clothes, and an occasional shell of needled beer, but Chester stayed alive even if he did not wax fat. He often wondered what the fifty cents stood for on his pay envelope and finally decided that it was come-on money of some sort. Now and then he played with the possibility that the last will and testament of Mameluke Tattersall might make reference to one Chester Tattersall of New York City. At such times the head of the traffic department would look up and see his least useful employee in a trance and he would feel unhappy that any one of his serfs was not finding joy in his work. Perhaps the next morning Chester would find an apple or stick of gayly-striped candy on his desk and he would again take heart.

Meanwhile, in far-away Plottville, the sands in Mameluke Tattersall's hourglass were slowly run-

ning out, and Father Time, plucking at his beard thoughtfully, cast a speculative glance at No. 32345-Series B of the New York Telephone Company's employees. Consequently, several mornings later Chester picked up a receiver and heard a voice requesting him to appear at the offices of Ginsbergh, Delehanty, McMaster, Randall, Randall, and Ginsbergh, Counselors at Law, if he wished to learn something greatly to his advantage. There he was informed by a gentleman with white piping on his vest and a Manner that Mameluke Tattersall had been gathered to his fathers in no uncertain fashion and that he had left the Plott Surveying Works to his employees. However—and here the gentleman with the Manner blew his nose loudly—it seemed that Mameluke had early formed a habit of trading a horse and buggy for fifty shares of General Electric stock. When he was not doing this he was putting money in some fool invention like the automobile or the radio, notoriously wildcat investments. It now transpired that hereafter Chester Tattersall was to receive a monthly allowance of twelve hun-

dred dollars, besides any little dividends that might be declared in the future.

When Chester carried his moist forehead and two thousand dollars back pay for his income starting the day of his uncle's death, into the open air outside 120 Broadway, he felt as if Sousa's Marine Band was playing *Hearts and Flowers* immediately over his head. Two grand in the box and three hundred next week, and the week after that and the week after that—Chester felt an overpowering love and grief for Uncle Mameluke surge in his heart.

"But come, come," said Chester aloud to several startled passers-by, "Time will heal this grief. What shall we do first?" He stepped to the curb and signaled to a cab. When it drew over, Chester saw it was a fifteen-and-five. He waved it away and beckoned to a gyp cab. The driver, surprised at his first fare in weeks, brought up his vehicle with a crash.

"Drive up Broadway," said Chester in a deep bass voice reminiscent of great magnates at board meetings. He settled back into the cushions with dignity. It seemed to him that traffic cops on the

route northward eyed the cab with new respect. He fell into complicated plans for apartments, clothes, beautiful women, parties. The voice of Mr. Joe Polochnek, at the helm of the cab, interrupted his dreams.

"Is this a sight-seeing tour or are you going some place, mister?"

"To the Ritz, my good man, to the Ritz," said Chester with a touch of impatience. An early dream of his had recurred to him. He had always wanted to run wild in a barber shop. When the cab veered to the sidewalk, Chester reached into his pocket and produced three one-dollar bills, his sole capital besides the twenty new one-hundred-dollar bills he had just received from his lawyers. Mr. Joe Polochnek stared at Chester's majestic back and decided that anybody who gave him three dollars for a dollar-fifty ride was a cokie. America, America, thought Mr. Polochnek waiting for the lights to change.

With his chest expanded almost to bursting and a deep frown knitting his forehead, Chester strode through the early Grover Cleveland lobby of the Ritz, roughly jostling two movie stars and

a former mistress of the King of Siam. In the barber shop menials bowed low and peeled Chester from his topcoat and jacket. He sank back into the chair with a sigh.

"A haircut, mister?" suggested the polite Athenian hopefully.

Chester waited for a long minute. Then raising his eyebrows and turning haughty eyes on the expectant slave, he yawned.

"Haircut hell," he said curtly as Lord Rokeby might have addressed his valet. "The works." And he closed his eyes.



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CHAPTER II

The Admiral Benbow Inn - Moses washes himself of Israel Hands - Through the Fallopian tubes on a bicycle - Starting at scratch I find a Tartar - What the Tartar saw through the keyhole - Exit Heywood Broun.

I

THE lobby of the Endocrine Arms was cool and dark, almost too dark for Chester to read the nameplate on the door of Apartment 1-B. He finally struck a match and saw "Cherry LaRue" carelessly penciled on a bit of cardboard. He paused irresolute for a moment; perhaps the real-estate office had been mistaken. He rang the bell vigorously and after a considerable interval heard the click of mules on waxed floors within. The door opened a fraction of an inch at first and an

eye regarded him. Then, as if satisfied with its scrutiny of Chester, the whole head appeared. The hair thereon was intensely black and was slicked straight back over one ear to which a pearl button clung. Two sharp eyes surrounded by large fields of mascara flanked a small straight nose under which amateur art had beautified a passable mouth.

"Miss LaRue?" asked Chester, sweeping his hat from his head gracefully.

"The same, sonny, the same," replied the owner of the passable mouth.

"It is about an apartment," ventured Chester. "They said—"

"Well," interrupted the head, "I'm not dressed for the street or anything like that, but if you won't blush at seeing a lady in a wrapper—" She waved Chester by her into the apartment. There he saw that Miss Cherry LaRue was wearing what one could only term a wrapper by courtesy, for it was much more decorative than opaque. To make matters worse, she retreated directly in front of a green-glass bottle lamp on a small table. This lady has mislaid her copy of Emily Post, thought

Chester, or she would know that a young unmarried agent for apartments dressed in a wrapper should never stand in front of a lamp. Even had Chester been half-blind he could not have failed to appraise Miss LaRue quite thoroughly. He was appreciative but a bit contemptuous. "A pretty lady," thought Chester, "but my GOOD-ness!"

"If you'll sit down," offered Miss LaRue in a voice that fairly shouted "too many cigarettes, too many gay wine suppers," "I'll barge around and get you a drink. I was just getting up, so you'll have to pardon me."

"Thanks just the same," hesitated Chester. "But if you could show me the apartment—"

"Oh, of COURSE!" interrupted Miss LaRue. "Of course, if you'd prefer looking at some stuffy apartment to sitting here and drinking—"

"Not at all!" came back Chester with what he intended for a courtly bow. "Not at ALL! But after I've seen the apartment, just think of all the sitting together and drinking we can do!" Miss LaRue's face again registered good humor.

"Well," she said, "I'll slip into some clothes and we'll pop upstairs."

"Oh, no!" said Chester, "I'll have a glass of beer but I won't go upstairs!" Miss LaRue laughed a shade more heartily than the crack demanded and disappeared into the next room. Chester removed an empty gin bottle from an arm-chair and sat down. Sunday papers, phonograph records and ash trays heaped high with cigarette butts lay on the day-bed; two or three colored photographs by Wallace Nutting, a mandarin-red book-case and a gaudy fake-Egyptian tapestry askew on the wall furnished the artistic *décor*. Chester lit a cigarette; a half second later his hostess appeared. She wore a skirt so scanty that he wondered why she had taken the trouble to change, and as if afraid that Chester would think her make-up insufficient, she had added more lipstick. Chester followed her into the automatic elevator in the lobby.

"Do you live downtown here, mister?" she inquired, pressing the button marked "6th floor."

"Tattersall," replied Chester, "No, but I shall. I'm uptown right now."

"Anything above Fourteenth Street is Harlem to me, Mr. Tattersall," confided Miss LaRue. "But about this apartment, if you insist on business; it's something pretty special, and it's expensive. I'll tell you right now, it's three hundred and twenty-five a month, furnished."

"That's not unreasonable," said Chester largely. "I'd be willing to pay more if I could get what I wanted."

"My God, a dough man," breathed the agent. "Well, take a look at this." She opened the door of the elevator and they were standing in a small square lobby. It contained no furniture and the white walls were bare save for an African wood-sculpture. It was the head of an antelope and extremely stylized; its polished severity and the sweep of the horns was startling against the dead white of the background. Chester followed his guide down a corridor as unadorned as that of a hospital. Miss LaRue opened a door.

"Now this is the studio, for instance," she explained. Chester stopped short in the doorway. The room was dazzling with pure light; square in shape, one whole wall was a glass skylight. A large

divan covered by a throw of Rodier fabric and banked with black bolsters and pillows occupied a corner, the walls of which held aluminum bookshelves of varying sizes. Two small chromium tables with black glass tops flanked the bed. A low comfortable love-seat and a deep armchair, both in figured green tapestry, claimed opposite corners of the room, while two green, black, and cream-colored rugs signed by Da Silva Bruhns slept superciliously on the floor. A box-like oblong lamp overhead, swung from chromium chains, commanded the ceiling and an original wood-block by Paul Nash, a still-life print of Cézanne, and a water-color of Franz Masereel shared honors on the walls. Chester, whose knowledge of contemporary interiors had been derived from *Harper's Bazar* and the magazine section of the *New York Times*, goggled slightly and turned questioningly to Cherry.

"An architect who's in Paris now designed this," she said. "He and his wife lived here for two months and then he was sent over to do some work there. I'll show you the other rooms." Chester was on the point of saying that he would take the

apartment without even seeing the other rooms but Cherry had already preceded him into the corridor.

They were now in a bedroom with large French windows; a fire-place with a Hunt Diederich screen before it and a mantelpiece which rose to a graceful flattened arch dominated one end of the room. The bed was square and low, without head or foot-boards; two small armchairs like the one in the studio, a sycamore chest of drawers, and an inlaid maple table with a bottle-lamp upon it comprised the rest of the furniture. Cherry opened a door, revealing a cedar-lined wardrobe fitted with a satisfying number of cupboards and shirt-racks.

The bathroom was a paradise of silver handles, white metal racks, sprays with thousands of regulating appliances, and ingeniously arranged tile-work. There was a square sunken tub of green stone, a magnificent glass-enclosed shower, and a shaving mirror with hidden lights. Chester stood stock-still and luxuriated in future hours of lazy dallying in this cabinet of wonders. She aroused him out of his coma to show him a second bedroom,

obviously designed for whatever mistress the apartment and the lessee might have. The chief feature here was a square dressing-table with two fantastic and semi-circular wings. In this room were full-length mirrors, deep clothes-presses, and a small alcove intended for a powder-room. Chester's mind was already rapidly at work attempting to find some way of disposing of this extra room when Cherry again called him. This time, to make everything quite complete, he viewed a kitchen and breakfast-nook and a full set of drinking utensils.

"Why," said Chester in awe, "they even left their cocktail shaker!"

"Didn't you hear me say the place was furnished?" asked Cherry. "What parties you and I could throw here, Charlie!"

"Chester," corrected that person. "Chester Tattersall."

"Well?" inquired Cherry. "What do you think, Chester?"

"Perfect," replied Chester without one qualifying thought. "Come downstairs and I'll write you a check."

"But not a rubber one, Charlie," begged Cherry. "I hate to get snapped in the chin by those awful rubber checks."

"Chester—not Charlie," reminded the customer again with some asperity. "Don't worry about my check; I have thousands."

"Of what, dearie?" asked LaRue.

"Checks, babe," replied Mr. Tattersall, stepping into the elevator.

Fifteen minutes later Cherry handed Chester a set of keys and waved him out of the door. Chester bounced down Twelfth Street toward Fifth Avenue on his super-cushioned rubber heels and whistled like a lark. Already a sense of well-being directly traceable to his new apartment had stolen over him and the exciting and mysterious future held open its arms. The thought that there would be no more alarm-clocks, time-clocks, or office-clocks—in fact, that he was done forever with clocks of all kinds—expanded his heart and almost brought a fine mist of tears to his eyes.

II

MR. JOSEPH FLANNERY, chairman of the Belmont Social and Pleasure Club, wrung out the rag with which he had just wiped the bar and lit one of the little cigars he affected. He then scratched himself intensively, looked carefully at a sizable gun-metal watch, and returned to the end of the bar to continue his conversation with Messrs. Shroug and Dugan, two members of the constabulary who had dropped in several hours before to wet their whistles. Despite the fact that their whistles were already thoroughly saturated and that they had not rung in to headquarters for almost three hours, they lingered on, blind to duty and rapidly growing blinder. A few blocks away, in the 47th Street Precinct station, Captain McSorley stamped his foot petulantly.

"Those incorrigibles are playing hookey again," he said to the desk sergeant. "Here it is eleven-thirty and they haven't reported yet."

"Oh well, Captain, we're only young once," said the sergeant tolerantly. "You know the old saying: 'Youth will have its fling!'"

"I know some sayings too!" said Captain McSorley eagerly. "Did you ever hear the one about 'Good wine needs no bush'?"

"I don't think so," said his subordinate glancing quickly into a book. "But I know one that says 'Snow, beautiful snow, that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care.'"

"No fair, no fair!" protested Captain McSorley heatedly, "I saw you! You cheated! I saw you peek in the book! Gypper!" Several large tears suddenly began to roll down the sergeant's cheeks and he stifled a sob. Captain McSorley was suddenly all contrition.

"Honest, Archie, I didn't mean it," he said remorsefully. "I take it back, honest I do. I just got carried away in the heat of the argument. Here, take this; don't cry." He searched in his pockets and produced a small square of milk-chocolate which he pressed on the snuffling policeman. The latter smiled through his tears.

"It's all my fault, Captain," he said, "I guess I'm too sensitive."

"Let's forget it," said Captain McSorley. "And now run out and see if you can find my little tru-

ants, Shroug and Dugan, for they shall have to get up bright and early to-morrow."

"Goodness, I had almost forgotten!" exclaimed the sergeant. "Why, to-morrow is St. Patrick's Day!"

"Of course, silly," said the Captain, giving him an affectionate pat on the head. "And now, run along and find my little scamps." But his little scamps drank on, oblivious of the time and their obligations toward the commonwealth of the City of New York. Down at the other end of the bar a melancholy young man named Rolf Weatherbee had been gazing into an empty glass for the last half hour. Rolf was being very dejected. At the end of a year of married life he was beginning to wonder whether marriage wasn't a gamble. Perhaps the little woman standing beside him that morning in front of the minister had not been a Queen of Hearts but a three of clubs. Rolf was full of a great deal of bitterness and a very small amount of rye. He knew that if he only remained where he was long enough, the ratio between the bitterness and the rye would change. When that happened, Rolf intended to go home and apolo-

gize for his hasty words. Unfortunately, the rye had not yet begun to work its mellow alchemy when Chester Tattersall punched the bell of the Belmont Social and Pleasure Club.

"As I live and die, if it isn't Rolf Weatherbee!" exclaimed Chester with a brave attempt at enthusiasm.

"Tattersall, old man!" said Weatherbee, his depression lifting. "You! Press the flesh!" Chester noticed that Weatherbee still shook hands in the manner made fashionable while they were in college. He ordered another rye for Rolf and a whiskey sour for himself, noting with satisfaction that Weatherbee was enviously appraising his clothes. Chester himself did not need an Alumni Monthly to discover what sort of work Rolf was doing, for the latter's uniform of black Chesterfield overcoat, derby hat, hard collar, regimental striped tie, and fraternity pin was as obvious as a placard.

"So you're selling bonds, hey?" asked Chester. Rolf blinked. No, it wasn't exactly bonds; as a matter of fact it was real-estate, that is, he was handling some of his father-in-law's enterprises,

that is, he was office-manager of the firm, what he meant was he was learning the business. . . . Another drink disappeared by the time Chester gathered that Rolf was actually pushing a languid pencil for his wife's papa.

"But say, Chester, where have you been keeping yourself since Commencement?"

Chester ordered another round of drinks and told his story. It was obvious that Rolf was impressed most of all by his clothes, although the story of Uncle Mameluke's legacy left him open-mouthed. Chester saw that he had been wise in buying that pair of cloth-topped patent leather shoes; every few minutes Rolf's gaze returned to them, and if he entertained any doubts as to the truth of Chester's story, the shoes convinced him. Nobody, thought Rolf, would possibly want a pair of shoes like that unless he could support them with a background of suitable clothes; and the other outward evidences of Chester's opulence, the altogether correct British bowler, the stick and gloves, and the beautifully tailored trousers he saw peeping from under Chester's even more beautifully tailored topcoat, convinced him.

Chester's funds at college had been too limited to make much of a dent on the consciousness of his class. However, a lucky series of wins at knuckle-bones and poker in his last year had enabled him to stock a small but rather elegant wardrobe. And when Heifel, the most likely candidate for the selection of the Best-Dressed Man in the Senior Class had dropped out at mid-years with middle-ear trouble, Chester had startled everybody by being elected to that important post. Nobody ever knew definitely how it happened, but there it was in the year-book: "Best-Dressed Man in the Senior Class—Chester Tattersall." It had been his one distinction.

Rolf, on the other hand, had been constantly in the foreground. He knew every one, was on all committees, and shook hands until his wrist almost fell off. He took tea faithfully at the President's house, captained the tennis team, and led drives for the Chinese branch of the college. He was chairman of Prom Week Committee, wore more keys on his watch-chain than there were organizations, and, in common with all Big Men on the Campus, was as popular as a process-server with

psittachosis. Hardly anybody, therefore, was surprised when, in less than two months after graduation, Rolf married the daughter of a wealthy real-estate operator and was taken into the firm.

"But you must come up, Chester, you really must," said Rolf. "I know you'll like Helen, I mean she's really delightful. We must have you up to dinner soon." Chester made a mental note to have a standing engagement every night in the near and far future, and, since Rolf seemed to have paralysis of the hands, ordered two more whiskey sours.

"You know, Rolf," he said as they turned bottoms up on their drinks, "you know, I think you've changed."

"Yes, it's my hair," said Rolf, suddenly moody, "I part it in the middle now. She likes it better that way." He stared silently into the bottom of his glass at a wilted piece of lemon rind. Finally, with an obvious effort, he shook off his dejection and ordered another round of drinks. Chester noticed as he set down his glass that Rolf's hand was slightly unsteady and that his eye seemed more vacant than usual.

Half an hour later, Chester, who had gone over to the free lunch counter to prepare one of his favorite sandwiches—four cubes of golden cheese neatly imprisoned between two pretzels—was surprised to find that Rolf was gone. Mr. Flannery, on being questioned, waved Chester toward the dark obscurity of the front room, and there, in one of the booths usually reserved for tête-à-têtes, Chester found Rolf. He was slumped in a chair looking very tired and contented.

"Why, Rolf!" said Chester, none too steadily himself. Rolf looked up heavily and attempted to shake hands.

"Where you been?" he demanded querulously. "I been looking for you."

"You're drunk," accused Chester disdainfully, withdrawing with acute deliberation behind a chair.

"That's lie," replied Rolf with heat. "Got to scotch that lie. What say go in the bar and scotch that lie?"

They scotched the lie several times. In a few minutes Rolf was festooned over the bar telling

Mr. Flannery that there was no balm in Gilead. The latter was unsympathetic.

"I guess you better take him home, mister," he suggested to Chester. Chester looked around. With the exception of Messrs. Shroug and Dugan who were still attempting to inundate their whistles, there was nobody in the Belmont Social and Pleasure Club. Nobody, that is, except a small gentleman who was busily holding forth to a mahogany cupid on the subject, "Resolved, that there is much more drinking going on now than before Prohibition." While Chester was looking at him, he took a pint bottle out of his pocket and reduced its level by half. One of the policemen went over to him.

"Put that away, mister," he warned. "Suppose a cop should come along and see you?"

"I wish I was dead," suddenly put in Rolf irrelevantly. "Poor little wife waiting at home . . ." His eyes filled with tears. Chester realized that Rolf's place was by the hearth, and with the help of one of the constables supported him downstairs into a cab. The lone inebriate who had been giving the monologue fluttered around offering sug-

gestions. Chester put his hands in his pockets and discovered with a sinking sensation that he owned thirty-eight cents; it flashed on him that he had forgotten to cash a check that afternoon. He ran his hands through Rolf's clothes; the real-estate hawker was smiling beatifically, his nose pointing toward heaven. Rolf's assets were a nickel, three papers of matches and a gold-encased lipstick.

"My God," shuddered Chester, "think of being found dead with a lipstick in your pocket. Even if it were your wife's you'd have a swell chance of proving it. And how people would talk!"

"Hey," said the inebriate tugging at Chester's sleeve, "lemme ride with y', will y'?" Chester was about to jump into the cab when an idea ran along the roofs and hit him. He pushed the grateful bar-fly into the cab. Another search of Rolf's pockets revealed a card with his address on it. It was a Park Avenue address and in the right part of Park Avenue besides. The cab started with a lurch and swung up Sixth Avenue under the eyes of a milk-wagon horse.

"Great things, them autoMObiles," remarked the horse to the driver of the wagon, "but I notice

they still have want ads in the papers calling for street-cleaners."

"Shut your face," replied the driver surlily. "What do you think this is, a debating society?" The horse obeyed wearily and plodded toward a cluster of milk bottles on the curb.

In the back seat of the cab Chester and Rolf and the Intoxicated Man rolled on unaware of the horse's envious regard. Chester was beginning to feel mellowly blind. Rolf was snoring in minor, blending satisfactorily with the rich bass of the Intoxicated Man. It seemed but a moment before they were skimming across the wide empty expanse of Fifty-seventh Street. The driver swung the wheel in a full turn and they bowled up Park, the asphalt speeding away and the yellow lights twinkling playfully at Chester. He leaned forward.

"How are you?" he shouted to the driver. The latter turned his head slightly.

"Fine! And how are you?" he shouted back.

"Great!" beamed Chester. "But don't get up! This is one of those new automatic orthophonics that play twelve records without winding."

"There's a lot more drinking going on now than

before Prohibition, mister," commented the driver after a pause. "No offense to you, mister, I was just thinking about it. . . . Is this the place?" He pulled up before an elaborate marquee. A large gilt sign advertised ten-room apartments with six baths.

"Ten rooms and six baths, look at that!" said Chester angrily to the driver. "What a gyp! Why, they ought to have ten rooms and ten baths. Yes, sir, a bath for every room and every room a bathroom. That's *my* motto."

"Is this it?" asked the cab-driver again in a slightly louder tone. As he did so a large, dark and powerful elevator man hastened out of the lobby of the apartment and opened the door of the cab. Chester passed the completely oblivious Rolf into his hands and then followed him into the lobby.

"Tha's all right, mister," said the elevator man as Chester made an effort to enter the lift. "Ah kin handle him; Ah took care of nine so far an' it's on'y foh-thutty." Chester backed out of the lift, narrowly missing a terra-cotta bird-bath. As the elevator man propped Rolf up against one

corner of the car, Rolf opened a red-rimmed eye and mumbled something about Chester calling him to-morrow at the office.

"They's a powuhful lot of drinkin' goin' on these days," observed the elevator man genially. "Yes, sir, moh'n befo' Prohibition." The door of the lift slammed and Chester moved unsteadily toward the iron-grilled door. He settled himself alongside the now peacefully snoring lush.

As the cab leaped through dignified side streets back again toward Fifth Avenue, suspicions about his fares were beginning to battle in the mind of the driver with his anticipations of a fat tip. Chester had given him a 12th Street address and was drowsing with his head against the side of the Intoxicated Man. The Heckscher Building flashed by, closely followed by St. Patrick's and the deserted intersection of 42nd Street. Chester was enjoying this sensation of being borne rapidly along Fifth Avenue at high speed; he felt the cab swerve and was surprised to find that they had left the Avenue. He felt the cab stop. Leaning over he saw with difficulty that the meter read \$3.65. He stooped cautiously out of the cab.

"Is your pal going in here?" asked the driver nervously. Just why he felt perplexed, he couldn't have said. A hunch was stumbling over the crags in his driverish mind. Chester stood swaying gracefully on the curb.

"Take him uptown," he ordered. "Take him to Hotel Alamac. He dwells there. It is his dwelling place."

"My God!" broke in the driver, "'way uptown again . . . Hey, who pays for this anyway?"

"Take your hands off the frets and stop fretting," soothed Chester. "That man there's one of the wealthiest . . . one of the wealthiest . . . Do you mean to sit there and say you never heard of T. Victrola Blueberry, the Gooseberry Tycoon?" He drew himself up. "Please. Please. If this continues, sir, I shall have to pencil the rest of your dances from my card." He stalked under the marquee and the door crashed behind him. A cab driver whose suspicions were rapidly becoming certainties threw the car into first with a bang and wearily turned the cab's shimmering snoot toward Fifth again.



CHAPTER III

The "Pequod" sights the White Whale - Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask - The storm at sea - In which our heroine breasts the waves and vice versa - Bertha writes Goethe a letter - Goethe writes Bertha a letter - They tear up each other's letters - Futility.

ROLF WEATHERBEE slammed the door of his office and flung his hat in the general direction of a clothes-tree in the corner. It sank limply to the floor, but not one-half as limply as Rolf had already sunk into the swivel chair before his desk. The creak of the chair mingled with Rolf's groan as he lifted his tired feet to a more comfortable position on the blotter. Outside his window two Russian pigeons gazed thoughtfully at him from the sill. Finally the younger spoke.

"Look at the sad American gentleman, Alexei

Pizzicato

Alexandrovitch," he remarked. "Do you suppose that he is one of those Yankee business men like we saw in Paris?"

"No, Dmitri Paul Fyodorovitch," replied the other meditatively, "for he does not seem to be kissing his stenographer. When you have hung around these American office buildings as long as I have, you will know what an odd thing is this 'business' the barbarians conduct."

"But, Alexei Alexandrovitch," protested the young pigeon, "is their business and love carried on simultaneously?"

"The subject bores me; have done with it," said the older sharply. "Come, let us fly up to the Public Library and have lunch." And he shook out his wings.

Rolf, unfortunately, was deaf to their conversation. The truth was that he was not having a very good day. There was a most peculiar fuzz in his mouth, somewhat as if he had eaten fried strips of carpet for breakfast. Only Rolf was quite sure that he had not eaten fried carpets that morning. In fact, he had been in no mood to eat breakfast at all. He had dragged himself into Lig-

gett's and tried in vain to flay the fuzz with a small coke. The soda jerker regarded him sympathetically and made a rapid diagnosis after Rolf had told him his symptoms.

"Mister," said the soda jerker picking up a cocktail shaker, "what you need is a Prairie Oyster cocktail."

"What's that?" inquired Rolf heavily.

"Watch," replied the family physician mysteriously. He took an egg and broke it expertly into the shaker. To this he added three large teaspoonfuls of Worcestershire sauce, liberal portions of salt and pepper, and stirred the compound carefully. He then shook it for a few moments and poured it into a glass which he slid toward his leaden patron. Rolf did what was indicated, although his technique was poor; he managed to get it down in several gulps instead of the one so necessary for the best results. Immediately a burning sensation spread east and west from his gullet toward his ears and north to his scalp.

"How's that?" asked the soda dispenser with a triumphant smile.

"Fine," replied Rolf with tears in his eyes, as

he groped away from the counter and fell into a shelf of bargain books.

Now, as he sat listlessly in his small office, silent save for the energetic typing of the stenographer in the outer room, the fuzz seemed to be returning twicfold. An all-too-clear memory of the events of the night before did not make it any better. If only he hadn't tripped over that damned poodle just as he had gotten safely through the door of his apartment. But once the night had been made hideous by the yelps of the mutt and The Little Woman had come out with blood in her eye, Rolf knew that he would have to think quickly. He knew his wife wouldn't suspect he was drunk just because he happened to be lying on the floor, but then . . . He had begun to talk.

He told of starting home early after seeing a client off to Albany. Of how he had met a poor old lady on Sixth Avenue, a poor old lady twenty-nine years old who had begged him to help her with her knitting. And he *had* helped her and his wife should be proud of him . . . yes, proud . . . instead of standing there and glaring at him like that. Then he and the old lady had followed fire

engines. My, what a big fire it was, too! Five alarms! Smoky Joe Martin himself was in charge, and Rolf had volunteered to climb into the burning loft building and carry out the helpless women and children who were being scorched by the flames. Only by the time he had got through the crowd all hope was abandoned, for the last lifeboat had left, so he had brushed aside the cripples and had jumped into the cutter. And why? Did she want to know? Because his wife, his dear Helen, was in it and was holding out her little arms appealingly toward him. So he had jumped.

Like this he had jumped. A goldfish bowl between him and his wife separated into several hundred component parts as Rolf jumped. Helen surveyed her lord and master as he lay floundering among the dying goldfish and then went and woke the butler and the cook.

"My husband is indisposed," she said. "Please put him to bed." And being servants of fiction instead of fact they had obeyed.

The last meal of Gerald Chapman was a riot of good clean fun compared to the breakfast which Rolf sat down to next morning. As he listened to

the flow of language from across the table he wondered where his little Helen had learned some of those words. Certainly not from him. Helen spoke on, enlarging on his character, his habits, and his resemblance to a weasel, although she seemed to prefer weasels on the whole. She meanwhile ate grapefruit, toast, a chop, and drank two cups of coffee. Rolf peered at her through red-rimmed eyes and wondered dully why he had ever married this creature with an appetite like a Great Dane and a tongue like a bandsaw. He toyed with a cup of coffee and then neatly overturned it. Amid the several and assorted remarks which followed, Rolf put on his hat and went out. He was halfway down in the elevator before he realized that he had forgotten his collar and tie. During the ensuing ten minutes under the lash of his wife's tongue, Rolf grimly adjusted his tie and began to understand how ax murders are motivated.

He shifted his position in the chair and lit a cigarette. There was a knock at the door and Miss Nolan, his secretary, put her head in.

"What is it?" demanded Rolf in what he intended to be a bark.

"Mr. Cressup left a memo for you to go down to the printer's and get those calendars," reported Miss Nolan. "You better hurry or he'll yell his head off its hinges."

Rolf groaned and brought his feet to the floor with an effort. His father-in-law was always thinking up some little errand that any nine-year-old office boy could do; it was ignoble. Why couldn't the old dope hire a runner instead of harrying Rolf from morning till night? He sighed bitterly and threw his cigarette into the waste-basket. He was reaching for his hat when a very unusual idea flashed up and bit him. Despite himself he smiled.

TEN thousand mad Irishmen laid down their trowels to drag the green standards of Erin one hundred and twenty blocks between applauding crowds of the Chosen People in honor of the good St. Patrick. Twenty-two brass bands composed entirely of Italian musicians split the gasoline vapors of Fifth Avenue with their cacophony; auto horns tooted, whistles shrieked, and slightly boiled tax-payers with green ribbons in their lapels, sashes on their chests and pennants in their

hands hung around Chester's neck like a lavallière. At regular intervals a bejeweled patriot whose recollections of Kilkenny derived from Myrtle Avenue, Brooklyn, shouted hoarse approbation at the ranks via Chester's ear. Two small boys attempted vainly but doggedly to crawl through his legs and finally compromised by camping on his feet. The Mayor rode by flanked by pink and powerful politicians whose eyes were dim with tearful memories of stories they had heard about the Ould Sod from itinerant Jewish peddlers in saloons. It was all very impressive but Chester was beginning to feel slightly bored. Then he heard the voice.

He turned his head as much as he was able and found himself looking down into a pair of large and smoky eyes which were looking at him appealingly from under a tight black hat. Chester, hypnotized for a few moments, gazed into the eyes. He was dimly aware of a pair of very well-executed red lips which were framing a question but temporarily he was too bewildered to know what it was.

"What?" he finally managed to say without looking away from the beautiful eyes.

"Oh, dear," said the lips, "I said—Could you please reach down and hand me my bag? It's lying right in front of you and I can't bend down." Chester, who by this time would have crawled through five feet of cement for another appealing look from the eyes, thrust one small boy viciously off his instep and groped successfully for the bag. When he straightened up and turned, its owner was gone. He looked about quickly and saw that the surging crowd had moved her a few feet away. In the ensuing noise occasioned by the passing of the Ancient and Loyal Order of Hibernians, Chester pointed mutely toward the outskirts of the crowd and held up the bag. Three minutes later Chester and the mysterious lady leaned against the façade of an interior decorating shop and laughed weakly. Chester held out the bag.

"There you are, miss," he said. "You'd better see whether anything's missing." The smile he received made thanks superfluous.

"There wasn't anything very valuable in it," said the lady opening the bag, "but this was an

old family heirloom and I really hated to lose it." She showed him a small roll of bills. Chester was much more appreciative than the remark warranted, for his first impressions were being speedily substantiated. It was obvious that the lady, besides her entirely pleasing face, possessed what Bertha M. Clay would call a slim and elegant figure beneath her black tailored coat.

"This lady is Nice," said Chester to himself with profound conviction. "Very, very Nice indeed." He hesitated and then said aloud, "I don't want to be impertinent, miss, but if you'll allow me, I'll help you out of this jam." Lila regarded him, decided that he didn't look like the sort of person who offered girls candy to lure them into cellars, and assented. He took her arm eagerly and in a few minutes they were on the comparative emptiness of Sixth Avenue. They walked along in silence, both hunting for their next topic.

"The weather is always conversation," said Chester at last. "Don't you think it's pretty warm for St. Patrick's Day?"

"What's pretty warm for St. Patrick's Day?" inquired Lila.

"Why, the weather," repeated Chester.

"Oh, you mean the weather," said Lila. "You'll have to repeat the question."

"Say, where am I?" asked Chester, noticing a glint of amusement in the dark eyes. "Do I hear the jangle of bells on the frosty air?"

"I'm sorry," she apologized. "I hate weathers; we Winters never worry about weathers."

"We what?" asked Chester.

"Winter, Lila Winter," replied the girl. "Now you know. And yours?"

"Tattersall, Chester Tattersall." They paused, bowed formally, shook hands, and Chester again took her arm.

"Let's go somewhere and dally with a sundae, Miss Winter," suggested Chester, now on firmer footing. "Until this parade's over we're practically isolated."

"Well," Lila said slowly, "if you really want to . . . but I'd much rather have a sandwich, if you don't mind."

"Why, we'll have lunch!" exclaimed Chester, cursing himself for not having thought of it. "We'll go—"

"No, just a sandwich," said Lila firmly.

"Fine!" agreed Chester enthusiastically. "I'll tell you what: we'll have sandwiches on rye. Scotch on rye—the best sandwich in the world, and served by loving hands in a place I know." Lila went into her smile again and Chester, about to break into the introduction of "Lucky Day" and "You Came Along," drew six deep breaths. What a girl! What eyes! What teeth! And hair! "I think I'll buy her," decided Chester. She appeared to be considering his proposal, then nodded and smiled.

"I'm not really a drinking lady," she explained, "but after all, it's St. Patrick's Day and if we pretend we just came over from the old country, well—"

"Spring is here," laughed Chester, "and what better way to hail it than by visiting Joe Madden's?" He guided her west again. In a few minutes they stopped in front of a brownstone house. Chester helped her down two short steps and pressed a concealed button.

"This is Madden's," he whispered, "Joe thinks Emily Post is a chapter of the American Legion

and the Ten Commandments is a movie, but he's a prince." They heard approaching footsteps from within. A thickset man wearing a silk candy-striped shirt peered out through the grating. His bushy eyebrows parted when he saw Chester.

"Hello, pal!" he shouted genially, opening the gate, "come in and bring the sweet mamma with you. Where y' been?"

"Oh, around," replied Chester. "What's news, Joe?" They followed the proprietor through a dingy hall and then into a large bright room with seven or eight tables. Adjoining this room was a small addition which contained a miniature bar. College pennants were strung up about the wall and over a boarded-up fireplace was a photograph of Madden in sailor's uniform. Lila and Chester sat down at one of the tables.

"Anybody I know been around, Joe?" inquired Chester.

"I'll say," replied Madden. "You know that guy you came in here with about a month ago—a kinda fat guy?"

"No, I've never been here except by myself,

Joe," said Chester. "But anyway, what happened?"

"Well, this guy comes in here half blind," said Madden, "he wants me to cash him a map. I says for how much, and he says a sawbuck. Now, I get fooled on plenty of maps and I got enough of them to paper the Garden. But, sap like I am, I cash him the map. This guy spends maybe a finif a month in the joint and then he has the nerve to ask me to cash him a map. Well, anyway, I give him the ten clams and ask him what he wants to drink. 'I ain't drinkin' right now,' he says. Can you imagine a hell of a nerve—pardon me, lady. Well, to-day the map comes back; it's a rubber. Ten satchels I'm out. He should come in here again. I'll wrap the joint around his neck like a collar!"

"Listen, Joe, how about a whiskey sour?" suggested Chester.

"Oke, pal, two sours."

"And, Joe, none of that stale liquor. We want the new stuff. If there's anything I hate, it's old liquor."

"Don't worry, Chester. It's coming on the loop.

You don't have to be afraid of this liquor, lady; it came over on a boat."

"What boat?" asked Lila.

"The 'John F. Hylan,' from Staten Island," replied Joe vanishing into the other room.



CHAPTER IV

A glimpse of the blimps - Phineas Fogg befogs Passepartout - Wherein a sutler lolls on a settee at a suttee - "Messieurs et dames, faites vos jeux!" - How a crusty croupier caught the croup - A short history of poltroonery - Enter Von Moltke, mouthing.

THEY were full-blooded lemons, soft and juicy. Chester felt almost sorrowful as he threw the wrinkled skins into the white enameled sink; a moment before they had been so alive, so eager, and now they lay spiritlessly gazing up at the hot water tap. Their life blood filled most of a large glass bowl Chester had found in the bewildering collection of kitchen utensils in the closet. He reopened the closet and brought out glasses, gleaming spoons and an ice-pick. More and more Chester was becoming entranced with his apartment;

he longed to shake its former occupants by the hand and express his approbation of their taste in furnishing this, their nest.

"This," said Chester to himself, "is more than a house. It is a home." And then he added aloud, for the benefit of the cocktail shaker, the ice-pick and the spoons, "It is the home of Mr. Chester Tattersall, who is preparing whiskey sours to greet that altogether charming and lovable girl, Miss Lila Winter." As the drinking utensils seemed totally oblivious of his words, Chester threw them a scornful glance and prepared to engage in the ritual.

He filled an ounce whiskey glass with the limpid lemon juice and poured it gently into the mixer. Three glasses of the rye he had bought at Madden's that afternoon and three spoonfuls of powdered sugar next joined the acid base. Chester now chopped ice vigorously until his arm was tired and crushed it with the heavy end of the pick. He dropped several spoonfuls of ice, now like freshly fallen snow, into the shaker. The outside of the silver receptacle began to take on a dull

sheen. Chester secured the top and began to shake it slowly.

He had managed everything very well at Madden's, he thought. Lila and he had had only three drinks, just enough to banish that unpleasant restraint which overtakes people who meet accidentally at St. Patrick's Day parades. Chester behaved altogether as a gentleman should; he had debated with himself the advisability of holding Lila's hand after the second drink, but had dismissed it as premature. "It would be premature," he decided, dismissing it as premature. Lila, after a lady-like interval, revealed that she was an art student and that she lived with an elderly aunt in the East Sixties. Chester's very casual proposal that she visit his new apartment was at first met with a reticence which it took another drink to dispel; but she had finally agreed. After some urging, she had consented to come down the same evening, a mark of interest which Chester thought highly significant. When they had parted, Chester was sure that she had allowed him to hold her hand longer than the time demanded by the books of etiquette. Recalling the perfection of her eyes,

Chester grew dreamy and only became aware of his task when he felt the chill of the shaker against his fingers.

Little beads of moisture began to appear on the outside toward the bottom. Chester went into second speed, then third, his arms moving faster and faster. The jingling of the ice was like little bells. In a moment the shaker was too cold to hold.

"Now," said Chester to the white sink, the black-and-white tiled floor, the shiny electric stove, and the closed door of the dumbwaiter, "we shall try it."

The "we" was obviously editorial.

He unscrewed the top of the shaker and listened with a glow of triumph to the hiss, the soft sigh, which rose to greet him from the mixture. Picking up a fragile green glass, Chester half filled it with a rich yellow stream from the shaker. He added a slice of lemon with reverence. Next came a delicate operation, the blending of the seltzer. Sometimes the seltzer shot out with the force of a fire hose and utterly ruined the drink it was intended to embellish. But under Chester's careful guidance a jet of silver bubbles leaped eagerly, but

not vulgarly, from the nozzle of the siphon into the glass. The whiskey, lemon and sugar bestirred themselves, quivered, and finally embraced the seltzer joyously. They all danced about under the prod of the stream, jostling the vivacious bit of lemon into absolute delirium.

Chester withdrew the siphon and the lemon slowed down until it floated sedately in the now amber-colored drink collared by a half-inch of delectable froth. Chester held it to the light.

"God, you could read a newspaper through it," he breathed, as he lifted the drink to his thirsty lips. He felt remarkably like the master craftsmen of the Middle Ages whose faces he had seen in advertisements for watches.

His elation was pardonable, for the drink was the perfection achieved by the addition of loving-kindness to experience. The sharp taste of lemon, flavored by the rye, tempered by the seltzer, sweetened by the sugar, and made gelid by the ice excused Chester's audible sigh of pleasure. The drink slid down his throat without the slightest protest from any organ flanking his esophagus. That sleek, well-fed, contented feeling which comes

of a shower, a shave, a good meal and a better drink spread like velour over Chester.

"The lotus-eaters were small change," he murmured lazily. This keen bit of analysis deserved another drink, he decided. It got it. He was telling himself he ought not have a third when the shrill cries of the telephone startled him. He poured himself another drink out of revenge and drifted expansively into the studio.

"Is this Buckwheat 3445?" an unsteady feminine voice asked. "Chester? Listen, babe, this is Broadway's favorite daughter, Cherry LaRue. You've got to come down here right away—there's a drunken man in my apartment!"

"When did you first notice him, Miss LaRue?" inquired Chester sipping his drink thoughtfully with his free hand.

"Around noontime, but he must have got drunk since then," said the voice over the wire.

"But it is now nine o'clock," objected Chester. "Why didn't you call me then?"

"Oh hell," was the reply. "Stop grilling me and come down here and remove him. I'm sick of looking at him."

"I really would love to, Miss LaRue," said Chester finishing his drink. "But I—the fact is, I have just contracted gilets and the man will be here in a minute for the furniture installments." He heard the receiver at the other end click and shrugged his shoulders. It was lucky that Lila had not yet arrived. He went into his bedroom and put on his jacket. After hunting about several minutes, he discovered a handkerchief which matched his tie and arranged it with elaborate carelessness. He then took off his jacket and put on a black silk dressing gown. Chester was still not so far from his young manhood that he had forgotten the way bachelors in vaudeville playlets receive lady visitors in their apartments. The buzzer interrupted him as he was combing his hair for the third time. He had barely time to light a cigarette and compose his face for the Bored Clubman Routine when it buzzed again.

Lila let Chester hold her hand a moment too long; she felt that the occasion demanded it. Perhaps it was surprise at seeing him standing in the glaring white of the foyer with the antelope mask behind his head. If it was, she managed to

conceal it very well. As for Chester, he felt that he had never seen her more beautiful, due possibly to the fact that he had seen her only once before.

"Oko is out," explained Chester preceding her down the hall, "I'll show you where you can hang your hat."

"Oko?" asked Lila. "It sounds like a nutritious fruit salt."

"No, just my Japanese." He determined immediately that he would call up an employment bureau in the morning. Lila's predetermined pose of sophisticated lady suffered a shock when she saw the room into which Chester led her. Without any effort at all she imagined herself sitting in front of the dressing table or having breakfast brought to her in the great square bed. After Chester had politely withdrawn, she made a hasty inspection of the entire room and with a sigh of envy began the mechanics of preparing her face for the evening.

"Chester, you deserve a rising vote of thanks," said Lila when he had finished showing her through the apartment. "You've certainly decorated your place beautifully."

"Oh, no, no," protested the happy hypocrite pouring out two whiskey sours and placing the glasses on a tray, "I really don't know much about it but—"

"But you know what you like, of course," finished Lila. "Let's see, isn't that from the works of the great Norwegian dramatist Charles Dana Ibsen?"

"You mean the creator of the Ibsen girl, the original No No Nora?" supplemented Chester. Loud bellows from each greeted his own humor and they found themselves arm in arm in the studio.

"Chester," said Lila, putting out a cigarette and setting her third whiskey sour down for a brief moment, "you have a swell apartment but where is the haunting saxophone, the rhythmic pulsating beat of the drums, the nostalgic call of the violin, the muted dissonance of the trumpet—in short, please turn on the radio." There being no radio, they were compelled to resort to a makeshift; Chester held a bent pin against a phonograph record and they waltzed. They were both excellent disciples of the terpsichorean art,

schooled in those graces for which members of the leisured class are renowned. It was a scene of indescribable gayety and one which would draw enthusiasm from even the most jaded bystander. The girl's eyes were bright with tears as she realized what the morrow must bring; for must not Prince Danilo rejoin his regiment ere the cock crew? She alone amongst those heedless dancers knew sadness. But do not think she passed unobserved as her tear trickled down the front of Danilo's tunic. The old Capelmeister, dreaming over his violin, had taken in the situation at a glance, and at a signal from his capable wand, the enchanting bars of Lehar's immortal "Merry Widow Waltz" teased the toes of the frolickers. Thus an old man who had known Love granted a tender reprieve to the blushing Bertha.

"Darling," said Lila one revolution of the hour-hand later, "I must say it is surprising to find a bloke kissing me behind my left ear. Perhaps because he is a strange cove he does not know that my lips are located due south from that tip-tilted petal men call my nose." The somewhat foggy but determined amorist rectified his error forthwith.

In another and simpler word intended for the high-school trade, they "osculated."

"Now there's a word!" said Chester settling himself comfortably back into the cushions of the day-bed.

"What?"

"To osculate."

"It sounds as if it came from a Greek root," observed Lila hazily.

"I love Greek roots," commented Chester, "especially with drawn butter sauce and a parsley garnish." The contribution was well received by an enthusiastic audience composed of one. After the laughter had died down, Chester's next remark proved that he was drunk.

"Lila," he said, "I offer you honorable marriage."

"You're crazy," said Lila after deep thought.

"No, just drunk," corrected Chester and he attempted to stand on his head on the day-bed as proof. His elbows buckled under him and he became moody.

"Why are you moody, sweetheart?" asked Lila tenderly.

"I don't know," said Chester despairingly, "I used to become sankey when I was younger but now I always become moody." This time nobody laughed, for religion is not a thing to be trifled with. As if by prearranged signal, Chester's last words were followed by a burst of brassy sound. A Salvation Army band was at its old evangelical sport of saving the Village from sin. The ringing chorus of "Throw Out the Life Line," dissonant but sincere, drifted up from the street. Its very banality sobered Chester for a moment and he realized that they were again at the bottom of the cocktail shaker. His anxiety to return to Lila made him neglect some of the subtler touches in preparing refills but it passed unnoticed. They drank another and still another.

"Oh, Chester, it must be late!" said Lila suddenly.

"It's only twelve-thirty, honey," said Chester at random. "Why?"

"For no good reason," she murmured, "I saw my aunt off for Springfield after dinner and I can go on like this indefinitely but I just wanted to say it." The singers in the street below stumbled

through the introduction of their melody and went into the chorus vigorously backed up by the band. Chester and Lila were oblivious for they were imitating a movie close-up.

"You *are* sweet, Chester."

"Then why don't you marry me?" queried the sweet person illogically. "With my money and your beauty—" Words failed him and he took another drink. "Just think of all the things we could do. Paris, the shops, the races, the restaurants, Montmartre, and the storied streets of Murger's carefree artists! Suave diplomats bending low before exquisitely gowned women, the sparkle of cut-glass, the flawless napery! Come with me on the 'Hydrophobia' sailing next Tuesday!"

"Oh, mister, I do love you!" said Lila clinging fiercely to him, and then, in a whisper, "But do you *really* love me?"

From the street came the wheezy notes of a dyspeptic clarinet and the voices raised to heaven:

*"Throw out the lifeline, throw out the lifeline,
Some one is drifting away."*



CHAPTER V

Bugbee at Rugby - "A cheesebox on a raft" - Leopold Dedalus meets Stephen Bloom - Arnica between thieves - The Abbess on the abyss - Feinberg's alter ego - I enter a lean-to in fine fettle - Inspector Lestrade bolts his lunch and shoots his bolt - The owl on the battlements.

CHESTER rarely felt nervous. The last time he could remember the sensation had been four years before, when the fiendishly suspicious dean of the university had broken open the door of a dormitory room. . . . But, he reflected, it was really the poor man's embarrassment at seeing his own young and plump wife in something less than a chemise that had made Chester's face burn with sympathy. No, thought Chester, turning down the conventionally empty glass on the bar, the

Il Penseroso

uneasiness must be due to Lila. Of COURSE he loved her. A little less than madly, but still, it was love. However,—and Chester reached into the bakery for a simile—when you've eaten five of your favorite charlotte russes, the sixth hardly awakens the same enthusiasm. He decided it was such a good simile it rated another house special.

The particular house whose specials Chester was sending south was the Plumbers' and Mechanics' Bridge and Whist Club, a mere gallstone's throw from what some people call "The Gay White Way." Although neither gay nor white, it nevertheless held sufficient lure for Chester to draw him thirty blocks from home. He had already absorbed four copies of the brand of lure dispensed by the Plumbers' and Mechanics' Bridge and Whist Club. He decided to have a fifth, then wondered momentarily whether it could be the ingredients of the special that were causing that slight feeling of uneasiness. But no; what could there be in an expert blending of gin, vanilla ice-cream and crème de menthe to cause uneasiness, even in a child of eleven? Why, the mere thought

was ridiculous. He ordered a fifth in a firm voice and looked casually about the room.

The P. and M. B. and W. Club was a very nice place in its own way. The barroom was typical of the days before the good burghers at Washington had decided that whiskey was absurdly cheap and a peasant's drink and had taken steps to bring it within the reach of even the most wealthy. The long mahogany bar, complete with brass grating and near-silver taps, backed by soaped glass mirrors and presided over by a moose head with the usual towering antlers, was being held up at the moment by the same old collection of race tipsters, college boys, con men, policemen, and dips. Nobody in the bar bore the faintest resemblance to a plumber or a mechanic, or, in fact, to anybody who had ever done an honest day's work in his life. At Chester's right two hoofers who would have received the bird at a church entertainment were loudly telling the world and each other what Lee and Jake could pay for their services. On his left, the omnipresent Man without a Chin was using a quarter shell of beer as a blind to steal two dollars worth of shellacked pretzels and inferior cheese.

Chester suddenly grew very tired of hearing about Lee and Jake and watching the chinless pretzel racketeer. He finished his glass and went into the back parlor.

The walls of this room, which had been set aside for the quiet and confidential drinking of the sexes, were heavily draped with black curtains. A number of small round tables bore shaded boudoir lamps, a pleasantly subtle touch on the part of the management. Had the room been vacant Chester might have supposed that he had wandered into a mortuary chapel. The room did contain two bodies, but both of them were alive. Alive with drinking, as Chester soon was informed. He had hardly sat down at a table before a raucous voice disturbed the twilight hush.

"Waiter!" said the voice. "Say, what's the idea of keeping us waiting for that bottle of wine and the cold cut I ordered? What's the idea?" The ex-safeblower who served as waiter fluttered respectfully about the owner of the voice and begged lavish pardons. When he had withdrawn, the wine buyer revealed himself to be an extensive and pompous gentleman in pince-nez. He seemed vaguely

familiar. Evidently a person of consequence, decided Chester, for the waiters at the Plumbers' and Mechanics' Bridge and Whist Club were not in the habit of bowing respectfully to any one, save it be a priest or champion pugilist. The waiter held up his finger from the doorway.

"Have it in a minute, Judge," he said, and Chester looked again, remembering why the face had seemed familiar. So this was Judge Rosen, the jurist whose picture appeared in the papers almost as often as the comic strips, and for the same reason. The Judge, it was apparent, was even then thinking of things connected with judicial procedure as he talked animatedly with his drinking companion. Even in animation his face was not pretty. Chester transferred his gaze from the jowls of the Judge to the lady and gave her a more acute inspection.

"Handsome" was the word Chester wanted, although at first he was too moved by the presence of beauty to bother with philology. Languor was obvious in her pose, an inviting air of having been around the corner and back again. Her lips were parted slightly and as she turned her head to

meet Chester's intent regard for a moment, he saw the flash of white teeth. A smile? He absent-mindedly ordered the wrong drink and catalogued the lady's charm, her aquiline nose, her large and brilliant eyes. He felt glad for some unknown reason that she had not bobbed her hair. The Judge's voice was audible again.

"And think of that mug, fifteen hundred dollars a day he's getting, and me, honey, up there on the bench ordering him to shut up and not ask questions like that because he was in a court, not a brothel! Oh, did I tell him? You should have heard me, I was good. All those smart lawyers think they're smarter than I am, hey? I used to chase ambulances myself!"

The waiter interposed and filled two tall hollow-stemmed glasses with the sparkling cider and seidlitz powder which retailed at twenty-five dollars a quart under a champagne label. Chester, watching the lady with the same carelessness a hawk watches a pullet, could have sworn that she smiled at him as she raised her glass. He would have been surprised to learn that she had been surveying him as carefully and as appreciatively

as he had her. He raised his glass and looked across its rim at her in the best manner of the motion-picture roués. The Judge was telling the story of his life and it was not a very funny story.

Thirty minutes later the Judge tossed off the last of a second bottle of champagne and arose somewhat heavily, first patting his companion's hand possessively.

"Pardon me a minute, kid, I got—er, promised to call—be back in a minute," he said lamely. Chester and the lady waited until he had disappeared into the other room. They looked at each other; she broke into a clear laugh. Chester felt nervous. What was the next step?

"Come over, nice boy, and tell me the story of your life," she invited. Chester arose in nothing flat and settled smoothly into the chair still warm from the impress of the judiciary. He decided to offer the gentlemanly objection.

"Won't your friend mind if he comes back and finds me here?" he asked doubtfully.

"What, mind my speaking to my old college chum? I should say not. Besides, I wanted to know what you were drinking; it looked so pretty."

Chester ordered two of the pretty drinks and she opened the Judge's cigarette case for him.

Two minutes later, Chester felt that he was sure enough of his ground to speak somewhat daringly.

"Listen, honey, how about you and I taking a walkout powder before the law comes back?" he asked.

"You've got an awful nerve calling me that, my boy," the lady remarked, "I might be a policewoman for all you know."

"Well," said Chester, "your friend, the Judge, did, and I thought it was your name." He got his smile and the information he wanted.

"No, it's Wendy," she told him. "And what's yours?"

"It should be Peter, I know, but it's only Chester."

When the Judge reappeared he found the two old college chums laughing together like old college chums and putting away a bottle of champagne which Wendy had ordered and charged to his account. He tried to be stern.

"What is this, young man? What are you doing here?"

"Believe it or not, Judge," offered Chester, "I'm a salesman and I'm just trying to sell this nice girl a Tattersall."

"Sit down, big boy," Wendy instructed the puzzled Judge. "This is an old friend from the home town. I haven't seen him since we used to play store together." Chester, on the verge of a remark to the effect that he would not be averse to playing house at this date, decided to save it.

"Well," said Judge Rosen, allowing Chester to hold his fat and gemmed set of fingers, "I guess it's o.k. if he's a pal of yours, but what's a Tattersall?"

"A Tattersall," defined Chester, "is a good deal like a gonif except that it has to be fed drinks constantly. No pretty lady should be without one. Stimulates the imagination and loosens the libido. Talks, walks, and looks well on blondes. In fact . . ." More puzzled than ever the Judge ordered another bottle of champagne, realizing that when you don't understand people the easiest way out

is to offer them a drink. He let Chester conduct the conversation for the next ten minutes. Then he addressed Wendy.

"Honey, I'm afraid I'll have to take you home after this drink. My wife's at the theater and I promised to pick her up at eleven."

"Oh, that's all right, big boy, my old playmate will take me home, won't you, Chester? You don't have to bother, really." The Judge attempted again to feel annoyed but the champagne prevented it. It ended by his beaming vacantly on Chester.

"Take care of her, now, remember," he instructed Chester, as the waiter helped him on with his coat and handed him his stick.

"You know me, Judge," reminded Chester. "Did I ever two-time you?" The Judge attempted to reply through the veils of champagne which were settling down around his brain, but the best he could muster was a growl which surprisingly changed into a hiccough. He departed after a show of gallantry in the shape of an abortive kiss on Wendy's hand.

"Ah, you naughty boy," rebuked Wendy. "Now don't you go and forget to pay for that champagne, will you?" He blew her a kiss from the doorway and tripped off.



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CHAPTER VI

The message to Garcia - Garcia massages Sascha in the garage - In which it gives Thorpe furiously to think - Further food for Thorpe - We proceed inland from Mombasa to Lake Chad - Portents for Hortense - Exit Wilkie Collins.

JUDGE ROSEN'S wine had transformed West 47th Street into a wonder boulevard when Chester and Wendy emerged from the hallway of the Plumbers' and Mechanics' Bridge and Whist Club. Moving sidewalks flew past, bearing pedestrians with bulging faces and bowed legs; through a shimmering pink haze they saw a receding perspective of skyscrapers vibrating vigorously. A block away ten hundred thousand mazdas leaped in tireless fireworks to extol the virtues of toothpaste, talkie, and peanut. Broadway, that great

throbbing channel through which flows youth reckless of consequences, living only in a moment, was slowly awakening. Here and there amid the laughing crowd could be discerned the lineaments of some painted woman on the alert for the incautious farm boy who might be carrying money received from selling his drove of cattle. Actors who had trod the boards with Booth and Coquelin stood on street-corners in their astrakhan caps and sadly recalled the great days of the theater. Ever and anon the surging mob parted to allow several Yale youths, well in their cups, to draw along the carriage of some renowned actress as she laughingly drank toasts to them from her slipper. Broadway's satellites were paying homage. Dance on, little puppets, you must not dream of the cold awakening in store for you! Let some one else pay the piper and refill the brimming glass! On with the dance, Great Maestro, and let us greet the dawn with a turkey-trot, maxixe, schottische, or bunny-hug!

A bevy of idle cabs swept toward the pair as they paused uncertainly. Chester took Wendy's arm gently, loosening it slightly at the shoulder,

and they turned their backs on the scenes of revelry. The moving sidewalk was carrying them toward Sixth Avenue. Wendy frowned, apparently perplexed.

"I wonder whether this escalator goes to the fur department," she said at last, "I really need a fur coat, you know."

"Hold the baby and I'll make a coat!" boomed Chester in a bass which surprised himself.

"Or hold my coat and I'll make this baby," offered Wendy, pulling up before a policeman who was taking a quiet nip out of a flask in a dark hallway. Chester yanked her away and the surprised gendarme saw them teeter down Sixth Avenue under full steam. "Just a couple of luses," observed Officer Reilly contemptuously as he raised the flask again. "I don't know what this city's coming to. *C'est un autre Sodome et Gomorrhe, par exemple!*"

"Isn't that the title of one of Proust's books?" queried the panhandler who had loaned Reilly the flask.

"Yes, and a fine book, too," said Reilly warmly. "Are you an admirer of Proust also? I've known

him for years. Have you read 'The Sweet Cheat Gone'?"

"No, I've just gotten through 'Du Côté de Chez Swann' myself," blushed the modest panhandler. "Just a dilettante, you know."

"A fine fellow, Proust," commented Reilly. "We were in police college together."

"Which one?" interrupted the panhandler with a start.

"Which Proust?"

"No, which police college?"

"The one on Fourteenth Street," replied Reilly. "Why?"

"You must be Berkowitz!" exclaimed the owner of the flask joyfully.

"No, I'm Reilly," admitted the copper. "At least I was when I left the station."

"Then I'm Berkowitz!" cried the other with tears in his eyes. "Good old Reilly! I knew you the minute I laid eyes on you! Do you remember the way you used to scratch the pencils on the blackboard in college?"

"Berkowitz! Old friend!" sobbed Reilly embracing him. "Do I remember? Do I? *Que diable!* Do

YOU remember the time the janitor and Miss Fletcher—"

Two blocks down the street Chester and Wendy wove uncertainly through the crowd collected outside a shooting gallery, unconscious of the reunion they had effected. Chester was attempting vainly to restrain her.

"Honest, Wendy, you can't—"

"No kidding, Chester, just a quarter's worth," she begged. "Only ten shots and then I'm washed up. And wait till you see me shoot! Honest, Annie Oakley was a tramp alongside me!" She eluded him and an eager assistant handed her a loaded carbine. Disgusted, Chester had already become absorbed in a mutoscope with the fascinating title "An Undraped Beauty in the Bath" when he heard shots and a shout. He stopped grinding unwillingly and looked up.

"Hey!" the assistant was protesting. "Over there! At the birds, not at me! Hey, what—" Wendy, snatching a loaded rifle, was neatly outlining the wall behind him with bullets. Chester plucked the gun from her hands and threw it with a dollar bill at the incensed employee. As Chester

and the indignant Wendy issued hastily out into the sidewalk the musketmaster was bawling his resignation to the manager.

"I should get my canetta spotted with buck-shot for a lousy fifteen a week?" he yelled. "I should be a target for every lush on Sixth Avenue?"

"Herman, PLEASE!" quieted the manager. "Lower your voice, what do you think this is, an amusement park? You're driving out the customers!" Sure enough, several elderly ladies who had dropped in to look at the "Stolen by the White Slaves" exhibit tightened their lips and departed. An elderly gentleman with a red face and white imperial tapped the manager on the arm, handed him his card, and departed with a few choleric words.

"There, now look what you did!" screamed the manager. "He challenged me to a duel to-morrow morning on the heights at Weehawken for YOUR filthy language! Get out of here, you're fired!" He hurled his subordinate's hat and coat after him. The ex-musketmaster looked about evilly for Chester, but the latter was already halfway down

43rd Street hurrying Wendy toward Times Square. Her protests were in vain.

"What you need is a good quiet art exhibit," he said firmly.

"At this hour?"

"The Annual Exhibition of American Mustache Artists is on view at all times," explained her guide as they passed the Paramount and wove toward Eighth Avenue. "Have your nickel ready, please." Above their heads the fancy iron lace-work of the Ninth Avenue Elevated stood out against the sky. "Oh, expense be damned, I'll pay your admission," offered Chester magnanimously. The sleepy matron in the coin booth languidly made change and they pushed through the turnstiles. He led her down the row of advertisements and they examined hand-decorated portraits of hosiery models, obnoxiously healthy babies, and toothy young men, all bewhiskered. Wendy paused to read an inscription in pencil on the margin of one of them, but Chester shook his finger at her. She blushed and looked awkwardly at her shoes. In the distance two green lights appeared and rapidly grew larger.

"I shouldn't be surprised if that's a train now," ventured Wendy.

"Nonsense, it's just those fire-flies again," dismissed Chester. "Why, I believe you're right! It *is* a train after all."

"It looks just like a Chinese dragon with all those yellow cars," announced Wendy coining a daring simile. The train roared in and they embarked. With the exception of the most world-weary guard Chester had ever seen, they were alone in the car. The guard regarded them sadly over his spectacles and then sat down beside Wendy.

"It's a nice night, lady," he said.

"Hey, what's the idea, insulting my wife?" began Chester.

"Oh, that's all right, sonny," placated the guard. "I was just trying to make you both feel at home. I can see you ain't used to riding in Bella."

"Bella?" asked Wendy.

"Yes, that's the name of my car here," explained the guard with pardonable pride. "Ain't she a beauty? I raised her from a child. Of course

she ain't decorated the way I'd like but that takes time. When it gets a little warmer I'm going to have dimity curtains in the windows and maybe geraniums."

"But it must be lonely here, MacFarlane," suggested Chester.

"Peabody, mister," corrected the guard. "Yes, it's terrible sometimes. When I started in this business twenty years ago the boss told me that with right thinking and clean living, I'd be on the Sixth Avenue 'L' in a year and on the Third Avenue line in two. 'Course I never dared to think of ever reaching the First Avenue branch, but—"

"And what happened, old man?" asked Chester sympathetically. "Don't be afraid of us, we're all friends here." The guard got up to open the doors and when he returned a tear trembled in his eye.

"It was a woman, my boy," he said swallowing hard. "Shall I tell you about it?"

"No, please," asked Wendy. Her eyes also were filled with tears. She patted Peabody's arm and he laid her head on his shoulder. He had begun to slip an arm around her when Chester interfered.

"I think we're getting to a station," he said

gently. Peabody rose sadly and opened the doors with a sigh.

"He's very nice, Chester," remarked Wendy.

"Why don't you marry him?" suggested Chester.

"I don't know him well enough and besides, I'm thinking of marrying you, sweetheart," she said tenderly. Mr. Peabody sat down and wagged his head enthusiastically.

"That's right, lady," he said, "marry in heat and repent at leisure but never let your children go in the elevated guard business. Yes, sir, when my boy came to me for advice I said to him, 'No, Granville, no elevated work for you. Get yourself a good steady job on land.' Well, he took my advice and look at him to-day."

"What does he do?" asked Chester.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Peabody bitterly. "He's dead. He died when he was four years old. A north wind killed him."

"A north wind?"

"Yeh, he stole it out of a mah-jong set and ate it," snuffed Peabody. "But at that he's better off than my other son, Otto."

"Why, what does Otto do, Mr. Peabody?" asked Wendy.

"He don't do nothing also," confessed the unhappy parent of Otto, "he collects tin-foil. He just sits at home all day waiting for me to come back from work and when I do he takes the tin-foil from my plug tobacco and saves it. That's a hell of a life, collecting tin-foil," he said savagely.

"I know, Peabody," comforted Wendy, "but after all, it's better than having him refuse to work at all, isn't it?" The guard brightened up visibly.

"That's so, lady, I never thought of that," he said. A moment later a cloud crossed his face, and he sighed heavily. "But both Granville and Otto are better than Bushnell. He's no good at all. He's in the Army."

"You ought to be proud of him," said Wendy. "Think of a boy of yours defending his country. Think of him in his spick and span uniform parading around with a lot of pretty girls admiring him. Why, I'd be proud to have a boy in the Army!"

"You don't understand, lady," said Mr. Pea-

body sadly, "this dumb bastard is in the Salvation Army. Well, here's 96th Street and I have to be leaving you." They shook hands with emotion, and Mr. Peabody, overcome with the thought of parting, kissed Chester by mistake instead of Wendy and waved a melancholy farewell to them as the train lurched away.

At 110th Street, Chester and Wendy, suddenly disconsolate at their loss, decided to leave also. It had grown chilly when they found themselves on the street again. Chester signaled to a cab.

"Twelfth Street."

"What's there, darling?" asked Wendy.

"The Tattersall boozing-ken," replied Chester, lighting Wendy's cigarette and his own with his free hand.

"It's too late to go there, honey," protested Wendy, "and how slow this man drives, too!" The chauffeur, listening carefully, promptly gave his car all the gas it could stand, and they whirled downtown between the pillars of the "L" and plodding milk-wagons. Chester threw away his cigarette and put his other arm around Wendy, who had been wondering for several minutes why he

was wasting a good hand holding a cigarette.

Chester was waiting for the driver to make change in front of the Endocrine Arms, an arm still encircling Wendy, when the door of the apartment house opened and a gentleman, turning up his overcoat collar, walked rapidly down the street. Chester stared in surprise after the retreating figure; it was strangely like Rolf Weatherbee, but what would that much-married gentleman be doing coming out of an apartment house in the Village at four in the morning?

"Who was that?" asked Wendy. "He looked —" She stopped abruptly. She knew for a certainty that it was Rolf Weatherbee, but the same objection had occurred to her. Chester was already guiding her across the pavement toward the door. He noticed in passing that there was a light in Cherry LaRue's apartment. "She can't be renting apartments at this hour," he decided with swift originality. Two minutes later he had forgotten about seeing Rolf in his anxiety to make an impressive entrance into his apartment with Wendy.

Even at four o'clock in the morning the cumulative of a trip through Chester's apartment was

successful; Wendy inspected the living room and bedrooms in silent admiration and emerged into the kitchen to find him already squeezing lemons and chopping ice. He dispatched her to put a record on the primitive victrola and they took turns shaking whiskey sours to the rhythm of a torrid fox.

"I feel altogether too good for the time of day," observed Chester as they annihilated their third drink. "Are you comfortable or do you want another pillow behind you?"

"No, I want another drink behind me," suggested Wendy, "that is, if you can see your way into the kitchen." Chester rose like a jack-in-the-box and rapidly confected another brace of sours. He thought dimly of Lila while he shook the drinks and was surprised to find that her features were blurred in his mind. Wendy's were scarcely less blurred when they had disposed of another drink apiece, but he had no difficulty in finding her lips. They drew a deep breath.

"Are you a good girl, Wendy?" Chester whispered into her ear.

"I may not be so good, darling, but I'll do till

a better one comes along." She was smiling as he put his arms around her; then he took her cigarette and crushed it out in an ash-tray.

They lay quietly for a moment, attempting to accustom their eyes to the darkness. A profound stillness, punctured only by an infrequent steamer whistle from the river, veiled the room.

"Honey," said Wendy after what is called a decent interval, "won't you take off your shoes? They're tearing my stockings."

FIVE floors below, Cherry LaRue cursed a bar of soap that had pirouetted out of reach. She wearily half-rose from the tub and retrieved it. It had become encrusted with a gray dirty fur, a mute reproach of her housekeeping. But Cherry was not thinking about housekeeping. She was thinking about a bond salesman, and what she was thinking about that bond salesman would make too spicy reading for the postal authorities.

Three miles uptown Rolf Weatherbee—who, oddly enough, happened to be a bond salesman—was undressing quickly with a very self-satisfied smile. As he slipped into bed beside his wife she

stirred slightly. He was busily congratulating himself that he had not awakened her when she spoke. Her words were precise and acid.

"Out with customers, I presume, dear?"

"Yes, darling," he murmured, "out on business," and to himself, "Oh, what a swell business."



CHAPTER VII

King Solomon's mines - Allen Quartermain puts the cot before the horse - Golda shoulders a boulder - The feast of Ramadan - A Malay in the mêlée - I bribe the Praetorian guard - Under the Beerbohm Tree - Exit Henry James.

HALFWAY down the block of brownstone houses between Park and Lexington, Chester saw a tattered flag flapping dispiritedly in the warm breeze. So it was still there. How many times he had sat around in the musty living room listening to the elaborate plans for a new club-house. A bar, gymnasium, swimming-pool, handball courts, hanging gardens—just as soon as the governing board could get hold of the right alumni. But the right alumni greedily nurtured their nickels and Chester's college club occupied the same five-story

mausoleum he had lived in during his first few months in New York. The last time he had gone down this street he had walked in the opposite direction, with forty cents in his pocket and an unpaid bill for seventeen dollars behind him. Well, to-day's lunch would be a labor of love.

"Why, Mr. Tattersall!" exclaimed the middle-aged mastiff who acted as the club's secretary. "It's been a long time since we've seen you. And aren't you prosperous looking!" she added significantly, her eyes busy with the custom-made blue shirt, the knitted Charvet scarf and the freshly pressed gray suède gloves. Chester ran through the usual excuses and adjusted his bill.

"You're just in time for luncheon, you know," gurgled the secretary. "Mr. Burry and Mr. Cutler just went upstairs. And Mr. Barrett's here too." Chester threw his hat on a hook and went up the stairs in the middle of her inquiry about how he was progressing in the bond business. Ten or twelve stern young men were scattered at the few tables stumbling through the customary watery lunch. At least nine of them still wore gold foot-

balls, fraternity pins and similar relics of their studentski days.

"Hey there, Chester, over here!" called one of the three biscuit-faced youths in a corner. Chester wove through the tables and shook hands with forced heartiness. This was Jerry Barrett, he remembered; the other two must be Messrs. Burry and Cutler. He sat down to a volley of questions.

"Oh, yes," Chester said modestly. "I've made a little down in the Street. I've got a system I worked out; took me five months to figure out. I buy on Monday and sell on Friday, doubling my losses and halving my gains. In that way I'm protected, you see."

"Of course," agreed Burry, whose carp-like face was growing more distinct in Chester's memory. "Say, that sounds like a good system!" Cutler and Barrett, scarcely less bewildered than Burry, joined in with appreciative remarks. The white-coated negro slave brought warmed-over soup and set it before Chester.

"What have you been doing lately, Jerry?" asked the Wolf of Wall Street.

"Well, I tell you, Chester," said Barrett confi-

dentially. "The fact is, I'm looking around for a good connection with one of the better advertising agencies. I think there's a great future in the advertising business."

"Why, it's practically in its infancy!" chimed in Burry, "I've had some good leads myself, but of course, it takes time." Cutler, it turned out, was looking for a connection with a high grade advertising agency, but having overslept the previous two Mondays was a bit behind, since he only looked for jobs on Monday. Previously he had sold woolen webbing for a Massachusetts mill, but the work was too strenuous and he had broken with woolen webbing after ten days.

"You got to be on your feet all day," he explained. Chester suggested that perhaps a position as timekeeper in a house of joy would be less strenuous, but the vague stares of the massed devotees of advertising made him decide not to attempt any further pleasantries. The rest of the meal was occupied with a long and dull account by Burry of next season's football prospects and an interminable *bon mot* of Barrett's about night club hostesses. Chester managed to add a mechani-

cal smile to the general guffaws and the company adjourned to the living room for the liqueur hour.

The least remarkable college club living room in the city of New York held a number of easy-chairs in which rested several other wizards of finance and moguls of advertising, sleeping gently under the financial section of the New York *Times*. The inevitable hand of bridge was suggested; Burry declined, excusing himself on the ground that he wanted to lie down and take a nap. The exertion of eating had evidently sapped his nervous strength. A newcomer named either Blodgett or Busby made up a fourth and the game started. The general conversation accompanying the game embroidered the theme, "It's not what you learn at college, it's the people you meet."

"And what do you do, Mr. Busby?" asked Chester.

"Well, I'm not doing anything at present," admitted Blodgett, "but I'm looking around for something in the advertising game." All present agreed that the advertising business held splendid opportunities, and Cutler mentioned a friend who

was earning fifteen thousand a year and owned his own home in Pelham Manor.

"Is he in the advertising game?" asked Chester, retrieving his cigarettes from under Barrett's hand.

"No, he's a public accountant," replied Cutler. "He's a swell guy. He's got a great sense of humor!" As nobody prepared to contradict him, he began to quote examples of certified public accountant humor.

"Say, Chester," interrupted Barrett suddenly, "if I remember rightly you used to be quite a hand at making whiskey sours at college."

"If you have the ingredients, I might try."

"Say, that's a good idea!" Barrett was slightly embarrassed. "Well—er—you know, they sell liquor here, Chester, but I'm afraid my tab is about all filled up. I don't think they'll trust me for another bottle."

"That's all right," said Chester. "It's all on me."

The hitherto lethargic members rallied to the call as if galvanized. In three minutes Chester was supervising the construction of whiskey sours in

Barrett's room while Cutler and Blodgett stood by panting. The black peon in the white coat bore in a quart bottle of rye, lemons, ice, a siphon of seltzer and powdered sugar, and bowed out backward with the largest tip he had ever received in that particular club. A moment later the door opened and Burry entered having heard the tinkle of ice in a glass while dropping off to sleep two floors above.

"I tell you what," said Cutler as each sampled his drink, "I know several people in the real-estate business and they say it's the coming thing."

"You can't beat the advertising racket, though," exclaimed Barrett. "Take any product. Take Lux. Take Post Toasties. Advertising!" The door opened and a man entered whom Chester had never seen. His trousers bagged forward three inches at the knees, his hat was battered and torn and an eighth of an inch of cigarette was glued to his lower lip.

"Keep right on talking, boys," he said, "I just dropped in for a drink." He was introduced as Benny Green to Chester by the obviously annoyed pledgees of the advertising bund.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Tattersall," he said, "I suppose you're in the advertising business?" Chester regretted politely that he was not.

"Ah, you're downtown, I suppose? No? Then you must be in the real-estate game." Chester denied both allegations, and added that he did not even sell shoe-laces. Green jumped to his feet, shook hands with him, and laughed delightedly.

"Oh boy, it's a pleasure indeed!" he cried. "What a relief to find some one from that lousy college who doesn't sell advertising, bonds or real-estate! I suppose these phonies have been hopping you up with the future of the advertising business."

"Don't take this bird seriously, Chester, he's a writer," warned Barrett.

"I am like hell, I'm a god-damned ship news reporter on a newspaper," said Green. "I'm the boy who finds out how they like the big buildings and our American women." The shaker was empty when he reached to pour himself a drink and Chester sent down for another bottle. During the inaugural ceremonies the hallelujahs of the advertis-

ing fraternity subsided temporarily while they flushed their tonsils with the free rye.

"Listen, let's get out of here," Green proposed. "These babies give me the jitters; unless you talk about the good old days at college or the advertising business they're tongue-tied." Chester hesitated; he did not wish to hurt the feelings of the assembled roisterers but there seemed to be no prospect of entertainment here. Green divined his feelings.

"You won't mind as long as we leave you the rest of the bottle, will you, college boys?" All four were too busy drinking to notice their exit.

"Some babies," remarked Benny as they descended the stairs. "If they're the flower of American youth, pass me the vegetables, please. I don't like to cavil, but—"

"Oh, come on and cavil, will you?" begged Chester.

"No," refused Green firmly. "You see, sir, I left my ocarina at home and I never cavil without my ocarina. What about another drink?"

"Well, where?" asked Chester. "What about the

Parlor, Bedlam and Bath

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Plumbers' and Mechanics' Bridge and Whist Club?"

"What, pay for liquor?" cried the horrified Green. "Didn't you hear me say I was a ship news reporter? I tell you what, there's a tea party on the 'American Hooper' to Erickson if you want to try that." Chester raised his hand to signal a cab but Benny interposed and led him over to a dog-eared runabout parked at the curb.

"Not yours, Benny?"

"Yes," replied Benny, "I had the goods on the president of a second hand auto exchange and he bled." They steamed out of Murray Hill and began the trek toward the west side piers.

"Who's Erickson?" inquired Chester.

"Haven't you ever heard of Emanuel Erickson? The explorer who went to Africa to hunt the extinct Phallician bird?"

"What's the Phallician bird?"

"Oh, it's a bird that pole-vaults around instead of flying. To hell with it. Say, you must have been at dear old Alma Mater after my time. I don't remember ever seeing you there." They compared dates: Green's stormy year and a half at college,

Dolce Far Niente

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a purely social call sandwiched in while waiting to get into Harvard, had terminated with the whole-hearted consent of the faculty and trustees just before Chester's entrance.

"They burned when some cheap stool pigeon told them I was running a bar in my room," he recalled. "Just jealousy, of course. They were out to get me anyway, so it was a good excuse."

"And Harvard?" queried Chester, as Benny's car almost orphaned the three small children of a traffic cop.

"Oh, I missed the train, so I decided to come back here."

"You must have a lot of fun being a reporter."

"Yes, we laugh all day long," said Green blandly. "It's the lousiest job in the world but it's better than working. There's always a drink within reach when you're doing ship news, and it's hard to get fired off a paper—sometimes."

"Have you ever thought of the advertising business?" suggested Chester. "It's the coming thing, you know."

"Yes, and I want to be in mothballs when it comes," replied Green. "Oh, we have fun in the

newspaper business. It's just chock full of romance. The mighty presses. The big scoop. Solving the baffling murder. Inside stuff. A cub reporter's beat. It's just drenched with romance. All for thirty dollars a week."

"Well, it's better than working on a punch-press," argued Chester, "or being traffic manager in the Telephone Company." A cloudy reminiscence crossed his mind. Green mumbled on.

"They give you a police card and a typewriter, the punks," he complained. "But a raise every five years? Why, they don't even bury you when you die! Some business. Work for the 'Telegram,' there's a paper. When you're fifty-five and you've been there twenty years, they give you a week's pay. Bye-bye, little boy, another guy hobbling on a cane in the state institution. Or work for the 'Sun,' that gentle old Y.M.C.A. Smoke a cigarette in the city room and you'll be sleeping on a park bench the same night. Or work for the 'Post' with the Great White Father of the Curtis publications spying on you from Philadelphia. Oh yes, Mr. Lorimer. Oh no, Mr. Lorimer. Or work for the Brooklyn papers, like the 'Eagle.' They raise you

till you get seventy-five a week and then fire you. They'll hire you back the next day for forty. Or work for Mr. Hearst, he pays the best. Sure he does, until some mug blows in from Chicago who's a friend of the efficiency boys. I tell you, anybody who goes into this racket is crazy."

"You forgot the 'World,' " reproached Chester.

"No, I didn't," Benny growled, puckering up his lips. They exchanged glances. "You thought I was going to whistle just now when I puckered up my lips, didn't you?"

"Why, yes," said Chester.

"Well, I wasn't."

"Is there," inquired Chester, "any foundation to the rumor going around that you don't like the newspaper business?"

"It's a lie!" denied Green heatedly, "I love its many-hued romance, its shifting, chameleon surfaces! I love its unexpected humor and pathos, its 'O. Henry quality,' as I call it. Oh, how I love it!" He spat out of the side of the car, careering down West Street through trucks and drays. Alongside and ahead of them were the piers, around which buzzed a few Yellow gyp cabs half-

heartedly looking for foreign suckers who might want to drive to Bridgeport or Montauk Point.

"Down for the party, Benny?" asked a customs guard with pale blue jaws. "Charlie's hanging around the reception room upstairs." As they stepped out of the elevator, a sleek young man in a passionate brown suit and violet tie rushed up to them. Benny introduced him to Chester as Charlie Rohlf, the publicity man of the line.

"The smile on this guy's face doesn't mean a thing, Chester," he said as they shook hands. "It shows he has a story and wants publicity. O. K., Charlie, bring on the dancing girls. As a special favor to the company, my friend and I will waive all stud fees, so break out with the prettiest numbers you have." They followed the colorful Rohlf down the long pier against which slept the "American Hooper," snoring dully after her journey.

"The Literary and Sewing Club of the Park Avenue Baptist Church is giving Emanuel Erickson a reception," he explained. "Have you read his book, Benny? I think it's marvelous. They say it's already sold eighty-five thousand. And wait

till you meet Erickson; he's marvelous. A real grizzled explorer."

"Yes, I know these grizzled explorers," replied Benny somberly, "They all get grizzled hanging around the Ritz bar exploring sidecar cocktails."

"Did he bring back any Phallician birds?" inquired Chester timidly.

"No, he got there during their mating season and they were all busy kicking hell out of the Malthusian theory," said Benny. "You know how it is in the spring; well, with the Phallician bird it's the same, only more so. So for no particular reason he sat down and wrote this book."

"Maybe he was afraid he'd get into a rut, so to speak, if he didn't do something," suggested Chester politely, "I often get that way myself."

"So do I," agreed Benny. "But the more I do, the worse the rut gets." During this exchange of double entries Rohlf was obviously impatient.

"Say, Benny, this party is right up your alley," he broke in. "What a story for your paper! 'Explorer-Author Erickson Fêted by Admiring—'"

"Not a chance, Charlie, not a chance," interrupted Benny flatly. "Unless—did I hear you say

you had—?” Rohlf’s face fell and the casual onlooker would almost have thought that his virtue was being solicited.

“What?” he asked with a beautiful show of innocence. “With the place crawling with Federal agents? You know me, Benny; honest, if I knew where there was a drop—”

“Too bad, Charlie,” said Benny briskly taking Chester’s arm. “Run along to your party, I’ve got to get back to the office.” But Charlie had already repented.

“Wait, Benny, just a second, maybe I might be able to dig up a small bottle—here, this way.” Benny and Chester exchanged glances and followed him across the gangplank and down a dim companionway.

“Some boat,” remarked Chester as they proceeded rapidly through the first class corridors.

“You ought to see the life belts on this boat,” advised Benny. “Some palooka named Von Ostermoor had the bright idea that if life preservers were filled with shredded wheat instead of shredded cork, shipwrecked passengers wouldn’t starve to death.”

“Did anybody ever try it?”

“No, after the first voyage all the ice-box raiders on board had eaten the fillings of the belts and they had to replace them,” returned Benny. “But here’s the scene of the big one-bottle debauch.” They entered a small and very clean stateroom. As Benny placed his feet comfortably on a spotless counterpane, Charlie appeared from an adjoining room with a bottle of vermouth and one of cognac. Chester ravished three glasses from a nearby pantry and soon a version of Manhattan cocktail was being published. Charlie was gloomy.

“We do everything for you birds,” he complained, “You use a brand new million-dollar ship like she was a stable and then go around trying to suppress news instead of saying anything about us.”

“We never suppress news,” denied Benny. “Do you remember the time the president of your line was caught in bed with that opera singer? I smeared it all over page one and this is the thanks I get.” All present accepted their third cocktail without stiffness and Chester began to feel a subtle good-will toward steamers, publicity agents, and

even the grublike members of his college club. A faint snatch of music wormed its way under the door, tickled Chester's foot, and died away again.

"Dancing," explained Rohlf. "Two hundred dollars the publishers pay for a Ben Bernie unit and you guys lie here dragging your dogs over the clean linen." He and Green began a long, involved, and half-hearted argument over the value of publicity; Chester decided to stalk the music and emerged onto the deck. It was already growing dark and the fresh invigorating smell of Jersey's leather factories, abattoirs and distilleries was being wafted across the swift tide to Manhattan. A rich wash of banana peels, broken boxes, ladies' short-vamp shoes and Hudson River goldfish surged gently against the "American Hooper." Following mysterious iron stairways Chester found himself face to face with an inviting alcove on the sports deck where a deck chair had escaped some careless steward's eye. He drew out a cigarette and lay back listening to the tug-boat whistles. His match had scarcely flickered out when he heard voices. Hardly fifteen feet away a large man with a beard down to there was obviously pre-

paring to put his arm around a slim figure which Chester immediately deduced to be that of a woman.

"Oh, Mr. Erickson," the lady's voice fluttered. "You don't know how interesting I've found your book! Imagine going to Africa all alone and all those dangerous animals and things!"

"It was nothing," deprecated Mr. Erickson in a fruity booming voice. "Nothing! But you! Ah, madame, you are so much more dangerous than anything in Africa. Would you call me daring if I told you how your hair reminds me of the sun as it rises over the Nile, how your teeth gleam like the snow-white sands of the desert, how—"

The eminent and grizzled explorer's beard was beginning to float on the lady's cheek. A feeling which might be either chivalry or envy decided Chester. As he approached the pair he heard Mr. Erickson's partner protest as the author-traveler compared her limbs to two white saplings in the moonlight.

"You are wanted downstairs, Mr. Erickson," he said apologetically, "I am Mr. Barclay Fein-

bloom's secretary and he sent me up to search for you. The ladies are looking all over for you."

"I will be down in five minutes," replied Mr. Erickson without turning his back.

"Would it be right to keep the ladies waiting, Mr. Erickson?" suggested Chester. "After all, they are your public and to sell books—" The business instinct in Erickson strangled the language of flowers and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Come, dear lady, one must dance for the grocer," he said with what he believed to be a lordly wave of his hand. "Let us go and appease the charming fellow-members of your club."

"Might I suggest," said Chester very politely and realizing that he might have to block a punch on the nose at any moment, "might I suggest that you hurry ahead and allow me to escort the lady down? Mr. Barclay Feinbloom—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Erickson. "Books, books, books. In these days an author is also a salesman. Forgive me, dear lady; we shall see each other in the saloon?" With a hasty bow he was off, carefully descending the iron stairs to avoid tripping on his beard.

"Hadn't we better go down?" asked the lady. "Your employer Mr. Feinbloom—"

"Mr. Feinbloom is dead," said Chester slowly, "I just got a cable from Palestine. He has been eaten by Arabs. Repose to his ashes. Do not profane the dead. *De mortuis nihil nisi boom-boom*. I have spoken." And he folded his arms.

"But who are you?" queried the lady with parted lips. "You said—"

"I am Roland of the High Heart," replied Chester. "The last of a family of journeymen barbers who fell in the Crusades. Penniless but scrupulously clean, I soon became a familiar figure in the low drinking dens which line the waterfront of Montevideo. Within a week I was running guns across the Great Wall into Ho-Nan Province. I quickly became the trusted adviser of mandarins, the companion of shahs. And then, in my thirtieth year, the misfortune of my life fell upon me."

"I—I think we'd better—" began the lady.

"You have guessed it," admitted Chester sadly, "I awoke one balmy May morning—Gad, will I ever forget it? The air was like wine as a gentle

breeze ruffled the scrim curtains of my tiny love cottage. What I had feared most had happened. I had become a hermaphrodite at ten cents a word, time and a half for overtime. Now we live in Middlesex County, have our own garden patch, and write each other's memoirs amid the drowsy hum of bees. Call it Life's Indian Summer if you will, but I feel myself a richer man for having known you." He had turned on his heel and was preparing to leave when the lady laid her hand on his arm.

"Please go on," she said, "I could listen to you forever if there were enough drinks to last that long."

"I know where there are," said Chester offering the lady his arm. "Are you doing anything right now?"

"Yes," replied the fair stranger, "I am drinking with Mr. ——?"

"Tattersall, Chester Tattersall, and you——?"

"Helen will do," said Helen. "And let's hurry before that wire-haired fox terrier comes crawling back here." It was just as well that they did. Scarcely three minutes afterward, Mr. Erickson

ground his teeth on the sports deck and vowed that he would feed Chester to leprous hyenas if their paths ever crossed. A second later his oath was forgotten in a shower of others as he inadvertently fell over a small stanchion. This was too much. With a hoarse imprecation, Emanuel Erickson flung himself mouthing over the side of the "American Hooper" and started back for Africa, leaving a chagrined publisher wondering what to do with the royalties on the second hundred thousand which had just been sold out.



CHAPTER VIII

The adventure of the Cigar Divan - Prince Florizel of Bohemia - I encounter the inventor of loose-leaf plumbing - I receive a proposal from Coleridge but marry Coolidge - The pavilion on the jinx - Good-by Broadway, hello Rosa Bonheur.

IT was five hours since the rosy-fingered dawn had risen over the top floor of the Endocrine Arms and revealed a still life composed of a half empty gin bottle, a full gin bottle, and Chester Tattersall. By ten o'clock the débris which made up the picture was still in the same place, since the gin bottles could hardly be expected to leap off the table and straighten Chester's tie or comb his hair. At about twelve-thirty his eyes fought their way through layers of rheum and rested dispiritedly on the bottles. Chester shuddered and

Mazurka

tried to sit up in his chair; at once a covey of steam-hammers struck up "The Ride of the Valkyries" inside his head and his tongue twitched in its ermine wrap. He played with the idea of taking aspirin tablets; he hated them but there was obviously no way out. A groaning search of the medicine chest in the bathroom yielded no aspirins; either mice or burglars had been there before him. At last, in the vest pocket of an old suit, he resurrected two grayish tablets which should be aspirin. Hoping fervently that they were not corrosive sublimate, Chester poured out a half glass of gin and prepared to send the little samaritans on their errand of mercy. Water was obviously out of the question, for he knew that people who drink water in the morning after the ordeal by gin get intoxicated all over again. Once in his mouth, the tablets lodged near a tonsil and refused to budge; a wave of gin only succeeded in melting them slightly. Chester's eyes bulged and he felt himself slowly strangling to death alone in a four-room apartment. A timid knock sounded at the door; he rose frantically to his feet and poured another half tumbler down. Again the knock at the door. Ches-

ter attempted to shout an irritated "Come in!" but the southbound gin-and-aspirin special turned it into something like the cluck of a hen that has laid an orange.

The door opened cautiously and a fantastic individual propelled himself slowly forward into the room. Although outwardly normal, the visitor gave the impression of having web feet. He seemed to be about thirty years of age and carried a battered valise in one hand. His face looked as if it had been slept in and his morning clothes gained nothing by having the gray striped trousers at least two sizes too large. One of the wings on his collar had given up the fight and lay exhausted on his tie. Yesterday's gardenia bloomed in the buttonhole of the soup-stained cutaway and lent a distinctly rural touch to an already suburban appearance. The caller looked doubtfully at Chester and the bottles, and apologetically began to back out.

"You wouldn't want any brushes," he said almost contemptuously. "What the hell would you be doing with brushes?" Chester goggled at him with eyes which were just beginning to see.

"What are you talking about?"

"Never mind, mister, never mind." The man was clearly anxious to leave. "I said you wouldn't want any brushes. I guess I know when a man wants brushes."

"How do you know I don't want brushes?" began Chester, an obscure irritation growing within him. After all, he might have wanted brushes and who was this punk to tell him whether or not he wanted them? One of the few liberties left was a citizen's right to want brushes.

"Listen, mister," repeated the visitor angrily, "I been at this business for over three weeks and I guess I know when a man looks like he wants to buy a brush. The manual says—"

"Shut the door," interrupted Chester, "I don't care what you do, only stop scraping your feet. I can't stand it." His guest's eyes strayed and lingered on the full gin bottle. He looked back at Chester and recalled himself with an effort to his duty.

"I believe you received our card yesterday, madam," he commenced. "Now, I am the Fuller

Brush salesman in charge of this area. As you recall—”

“Madam?” cut in Chester quickly, “See here, my fine—”

“Er—I should have said—now, for instance—” The salesman’s face began to assume a hunted look and he hastily consulted a pocket folder. “As the card promised, he will call on you neat and efficient. Polite and helpful, he brings you surcease from kitchen toil, for in his magic kit he bears brushes which will do the work of a hundred hands.” He undid the catch on the valise and opened it.

“No, no!” interposed Chester hastily. “Here, have a drink.” Hung up in the middle of a none-too-facile gambit, the salesman could not resist the sparkling bribe. As a matter of record, it was far from sparkling; gin and sunshine do not blend, but the ready way in which it disappeared was worthy of a better drink. While Chester was drinking the salesman bent over his bag.

“Here, my friend, have a brush,” he offered, exhuming a stubby brush with a white handle and placing it upon the table. “Here is the housekeep-

er’s boon. It will scour frying-pans, kettles, bird-cages, alarm clocks, radiators, tea-strainers and corn-poppers. It is a great little implement; a marvelous device which saves the housewife many steps a day.”

“Thank you, pal,” said Chester gratefully. “Of course you don’t mind my calling you ‘pal,’ do you? Or would you rather have me call you Mr. McDuff?”

“Who told you my name?” asked the salesman, open-mouthed.

“There it is on the lining of your hat,” indicated Chester quietly. “Elemental, my dear McDuff, elemental!” He joined his finger-tips and closed his eyes, as he always did when he was absorbed. “Roger Llewellyn Chicago McDuff. Hmm, an interesting name. Unless I am very much mistaken, late of the Indian Army, a retired major on half pay, I should say; smokes a fair Trichinopoly cheroot, has a slight limp in his left leg due to a saber-cut received at Peshawar during the Sepoy Mutiny and lives alone except for an elderly housekeeper in a semi-detached villa at Maida Vale.”

"Marvelous, my dear Tattersall!" cried McDuff. "But how did you ever guess it?"

"Simple deduction, my dear McDuff. You see you do not observe. First, have a drink." He poured the balance of the bottle into the two glasses and they drank solemnly. Roger dipped forward into the bag.

"Here, have a brush," he said expansively. "This little brush will clean false teeth, false hair, falsettos, earrings, gold toothpicks, carburetors, and preserve jars. It's handy, it's dandy, it's the best that money can buy, guaranteed not to warp, corrode, snap, slip, or split. Are you a duelist? Here is the very thing with which to wipe your foils after defending your honor. Have you been thinking of painting your rabbit-warren? The United States Department of Agriculture chose this brush over seventy-nine others for painting rabbit-warrens. Are you—" But already Chester was thrusting another drink upon him. As his distinguished client drank, the great investigator loaded his pipe with shag and threw himself on the disordered heap of cushions before the fire. Outside Baker Street was wrapped in fog and

silent save for the sound of an occasional four-wheeler.

"When you came in, McDuff," explained the detective, "I noticed that there was a turban inside your hat. Your erect carriage and bristling mustache suggested the colonial soldier and the six stripes on your sleeve showed me your rank. One of your legs is shorter than the other and I deduced at once that you must limp."

"I do," gaped the wonder-struck McDuff. "But how did you know I had received a saber-cut at Peshawar?"

"A mere detail," waved Tattersall. "When you sat down you rolled up your trouser leg above the knee, a procedure common to all sufferers from saber wounds incurred during the late unpleasantness at Peshawar. Have you read my little monograph on cigar ashes?"

"No," admitted McDuff ruefully.

"You should, McDuff, you should," advised Tattersall. "The sprinkling of ash on your sleeve marks you clearly an habitual user of Trichinopolies. Your trousers have not been brushed lately; ergo, you are not married and maintain a house-

keeper. As for the rest, the ticket stub protruding from your hatband proclaims that you have come from Maida Vale, which my Baedeker tells me is a community of semi-detached villas."

"Brilliant, my dear Tattersall!" exclaimed McDuff admiringly.

"Absurdly simple, my dear McDuff," remarked Tattersall offhandedly. "Do have another drink, my dear fellow." They drained their glasses and again McDuff rummaged in his bag.

"Have another brush," he invited. "This one is for cleaning cats, dogs, parrots, ferrets, mandrills, stoats, shoats and animals of all descriptions. No dog is complete without one. It cleans without scratching, or if you prefer, scratches without cleaning. Give it to your wife, your sweetheart, your mistress; and years from now, when you hear the pitter-patter of tiny feet and feel the clutching hands at your bosom—your breast, I mean," he corrected hastily, "remember Roger Llewellyn Chicago McDuff, the Brush Man. This little brush will quiet the baby, make the iceman behave, and wind the clock. It saves time and trouble, toil and tears."

"How long have you been in the brush business, Roger?" inquired Chester.

"Twenty-two years next August," said McDuff. "Yes, sir, twenty-two years. Before that I was a piano-tuner." The surge of memories was too much for him; suddenly he began to cry softly, his well-racked frame knitted with sobs. When he finally managed to curb his emotion, his face was streaked with tears.

"I'm just a piano-tuner looking for a piano," he said with trembling lips, "I'm an orange-squeezer looking for an orange. I'm a goldfish looking for a bowl, a bowling-alley looking for a pin in the great haystack men call Life."

"Now, now, Roger," comforted Chester. "Here, take this and see you don't spill it like you did the last one." McDuff bathed his face in the drink and once more searched in his magic pack.

"Here's the best brush of all," he beamed. "This, my friend, will clean your radio, bookends, tie racks and bathtub. It is particularly good for farm dwellers. You can curry your horse, curry your chickens, curry your rice and curry your old man, all with this little brush. You can brush

the pigs, milk the cows, fly a kite, string a banjo, go to hell or do anything you want. It's our wonder brush, a handy dandy little instrument, more than a tool, almost a mother, yet so easy that even a child can operate it."

The last part of McDuff's speech was delivered almost in a whisper and from a point gradually nearing the floor, for the brush expert's knees were beginning to buckle beneath him. Chester himself was in no condition to unbuckle them, for a tremendous roaring in his ears was lulling him into Never-Never Land. Afterwards he remembered dimly that Roger had produced a small white brush with fine quills and had kept whimpering plaintively that he'd forgotten its use. There was some sort of confused interlude in which he recalled helping the brush magnate to the door and McDuff's instant reappearance to inform him that the small brush was meant for his teeth. Chester looked up at him from the day-bed, gathered his lips with a painful effort and listlessly gave him what is known in sporting circles as the bird. Then, very abruptly, he saw McDuff, the apartment, the two gin bottles, and hundreds of rows of busy

brushes merge into each other as he dove smoothly down a booming tunnel into unconsciousness.

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As the elevator climbed slowly toward the sixth floor, Cherry LaRue nodded critically toward her reflection in the polished brass which framed the door of the car. "You'll do," she thought. "No ball of fire, it's true, but enough to make a journeyman seducer pause thoughtfully." A fresh manicure gleamed redly from her finger-tips and a half hour's careful brushwork had reassembled her face into a reasonable likeness of beauty. Her first formal call on the star boarder must be put over with dispatch and form. There was no earthly reason why Cherry should feel nervous, yet the red and white corpuscles were sliding more quickly than usual through her pretty auricle and ventricle. They slowed down somewhat when she hesitated in the doorway of the duchy of Tattersall and looked doubtfully down the littered hall. When her eyes rested on Chester draped over the arm and back of a chair, the empty bottles and the welter of brushes, her doubts disappeared.

"There's been foul play here, my boy," she said

severely to Chester. "Is this a case for the coroner?" Her answer was a low-pitched snore which ended in a whistle. What happened next was unusual for Cherry LaRue, to say the least. She emerged from a skirmish with the bathroom and kitchen, a towel tucked about her waist and a broom held menacingly in her hand. Disdainfully she swept aside the bequests of Roger Llewellyn Chicago McDuff and went to work. The lord of the manor snored on in four-four time. It would be nice to think that his dreams concerned Helen, or perhaps Wendy, or even Lila, but they did not. Oddly enough, Chester was busy dreaming of pot-roast, an enormous brown plateau of pot-roast flanked by fields of brussels sprouts across which he pumped on a shiny bicycle. Gradually the smell of pot-roast was usurped by another and sharper odor—coffee. It cut through the heavy pot-roast smell and dispersed it; its warming fragrance attacked and finally penetrated into the very nub of his being. When that happened, Chester woke up, startled. Not more than a yard away, Cherry LaRue, smoking a cigarette, was looking at him intently. It took Chester almost a minute to de-

cide who she was and after that, another minute on what to do about it. His first move consisted of closing his mouth.

"I've been waiting for you to do that," she remarked. "You are probably the best wheezer I've ever met, socially and otherwise, and Aunt Cherry has met some very, very good wheezers in her time." Chester gargled a number of syllables intended to convey hospitality, embarrassment at his own appearance, and readiness to correct it, and disappeared into the bathroom. A few minutes later he appeared somewhat more comely but still slightly hazy.

"I—I—you—"

"That's all right, babe," Cherry good-naturedly dismissed all that had gone before. "Now sit down and let me pour you some coffee. You're lucky I had some knocking around my kitchenette, Charlie."

"Chester," corrected the lucky one patiently. "I wasn't expecting any callers or I would have straightened up the place."

"Yes, I see you laid in a supply of brushes," indicated Cherry. "I just dropped in to pass the

time of day. You haven't been in to see me once since you've been here," she remarked with the merest hint of reproach in her voice.

"I—well, I've been very busy, the fact is," explained Chester, and added as an afterthought, "I've been taking riding lessons."

"You probably have," agreed Cherry enigmatically. "Are there any new horses in your stables?"

"Only one," replied Chester. "A pretty little thing, fourteen hands high and a glossy sealskin coat. By Gad, suh, a finer piece of horse-flesh you never saw." He would have developed the theme but the telephone in his bedroom began ringing. Leaving Cherry to her own vices, Chester carefully shut the door.

"Hello, Chester?" Rolf's voice was eager. "Say, I called you twice this morning. How about week-ending with me?"

"Weekending? Where?"

"Up in Little Congo," went on Rolf. "My family—we can catch a train at three-thirteen from Grand Central and be back here Sunday night ... do you a lot of good." Chester remembered that Rolf had sprung from Little Congo, Massa-

chusetts, where report had it the Weatherbees owned palatial homes, immense sugar plantations, brick kilns or something of that sort. The idea of a Spring weekend was hardly distasteful but Chester had other plans. Rolf was insistent.

"You can break it, Chester," he urged. "Come on. We can leave Sunday right after dinner if you want to. What do you say?"

"I tell you what, Rolf," said Chester suddenly. "I could go up with you, say a week from to-day. Is that all right?" The former thought for a while.

"I don't see how, Chester, unless— Well, you see, I've been promising to come up for the past winter and one thing or another ... I'll tell you what I'll do. Can you call me some time next week and we'll fix it up for a couple of weeks from now maybe?" Chester, relieved, promised.

"We'll have to get together soon, Chester," said Rolf. "A little evening out, hey?" Chester pictured the gleam in his eye; he remembered their last evening out but said nothing. Cherry was curled up on the couch when he came back into the other room. There was no doubt that she was attractive and he felt vaguely sorry that he had

buzzed around foreign sugar when the domestic article was so convenient. Too convenient, perhaps, the thought occurred to him, and he wondered whether this could have been the reason for his hesitation.

"I ought to offer you a drink," he said politely.

"Don't bother." She smiled at him. "I'm not really the dipso you take me for. Besides, there's your phone ringing again." A feminine voice on the wire quickened Chester's pulse.

"Helen! I've been waiting for your call. Did you get home all right?"

"Oh, I was slightly fried when I got into the cab but it wore off by the time I got home. About to-night, is that still a date?" The Spirit of Galantry offered to call for her but she was ambiguous. Something about shopping, tea with a friend . . . yes, in the lobby, at six-thirty. On the balcony, near the writing tables. Chester's face was suffused when he hung up the receiver. He turned to leave the bedroom and noticed with regret that he had forgotten to close the door behind him. Sloppy workmanship. One look at

Cherry's face was enough to tell him that she had overheard.

"Well, that's that," she said getting up. "I really came up to invite you to a party to-night but I see you're busy. Drop in sometime when you're leaving the elevator." The tone of her words corroborated his suspicion. He attempted to thank her for the coffee but it sounded dismal, and it was not until the too-emphatic closing of the door that he realized that she had straightened up the room. There was a time when Chester would have shrugged a "What the hell" under the same circumstances. Now he remained thoughtfully looking after her. A very odd feeling of contrition mixed with shame possessed him as he viewed the coffee cups and percolator on the tray.



CHAPTER IX

Craig Kennedy discovers a crook in his arm - The phoenix from the ashes - I meet Lady Brett, her mouth a scarlet wound above the hibiscus blossoms at her throat - Lady into fox, fox into chickens, Tinker to Evans to Chance - Compton Mackenzie falls on his sword-cane as a gesture.

HARRY HIGGINBOTHAM paused between blue plates at the rear of Spiegel's Restaurant and beckoned to his friend and fellow-waiter, Otto Norelius.

"He's in here again," he whispered. "Up there, at the table near the register. Boy, what a baby this time!"

"On the make again?" asked Otto, peering across hillocks of Danish pastry.

"What I mean," clucked Harry appreciatively.

Accelerando

"No, not there, the table by the window; do you see her?"

"Say, not so bad," approved Otto. "Not so BAD! That guy certainly knows where to pick 'em. Well, why not? You were young yourself once!"

"Yeh, and I didn't lose any time," confirmed Harry. "But with me it was different. Every time I knocked off a babe she turned out to have a husband named Jack. It got so that I walked into a room and looked around for a fire-escape without thinking." His eyes brightened. "There was that doll on 23rd Street. She and me are like that; her husband's a glass-blower and works at night. That time I'm working mornings in a place on Sixth Avenue near 42nd Street. I used to breeze in regular as soon as it gets dark. She was nuts on fruits and flowers, so I'd bring her a geranium and a bunch of bananas and we'd play house. She was a honey."

"Wait a minute, those gorillas on my station are yelling for short ribs of beef," interrupted Otto. He disappeared and returned sourly after a moment. "Say, this place is losing money," he

complained. "They got tired waiting and blew. They must eat their food off moving belts at home. Well, what happened?"

"Plenty," replied Harry. "One night we're making fudge when in lams papa burning like a blow-torch. Some bastard must have squealed, because he brought along a gun. I took it away from him and gave him a good lecture. Only the gun went off by accident and there was hell to pay. That's where I got this." He bared a bluish scar on his wrist.

"In your hat," grunted Otto. "I remember you told me about a year ago that you got scalded with a hot plate."

"I did," assured Harry. "The plate with the fudge on it." He scooped up a handful of seed rolls and threw them into a basket. "Did I ever tell you about one time in Norumbega Park—"

"When you were necking a dame inside a cannon and it went off and you were shot into a net and her husband was the owner of the concession?" finished Otto. "Yeh, you told me."

"You got it all wrong," protested Harry. "We

were necking on the net and her husband was shot out of the cannon."

"It's a lousy story either way," commented Otto. "You better think up some new stories and give that bird and his dame the check they've been hollering for." Chester gathered up a handful of change and joined Helen at the mirror where she had been quickly examining her face. Everything was in the place specified for it by *The Young Lady's Guide* but a reassuring dab of powder settled her mind.

"You're radiant to-night, Helen," observed Chester almost automatically.

"And you're beginning to repeat yourself, my boy," she countered. "I believe I remember something to that effect when I met you two hours ago. What are we doing?"

"Anything you say. Musical comedy maybe?" She paused and considered, finally wrinkling her nose. "Isn't there something more exciting?"

"There is," agreed Chester. "But it's too early. Meanwhile, couldn't we—er—"

"I know!" exclaimed Helen. "Take me to the fight!"

"The fight?" queried Chester dubiously. "What fight?"

"Oh, come now!" Suddenly a headline seen several days before recurred to him.

"You don't mean Kid Chocolate?" She nodded vigorously. Chester pondered the thought. After all, it wasn't such a bad idea. The last fights he had seen were intercollegiate dancing matches in which the opponents had fanned each other into pneumonia. In the cab which was bearing them toward St. Nicholas Arena, Chester opened his coat and displayed with some degree of satisfaction the four flasks secreted about his person.

"Purely medicinal, of course?"

"Purely," replied Chester. "My physician insists—in case anything should happen, you know."

"It has happened," returned Helen. "If I weren't a lady I would have suggested it some time ago." She engulfed a comfortable amount of the still cold sours, caught her breath, and tilted the flask again. Their course uptown was punctuated by frequent administrations of the sovereign remedy for backache, megrims, and virtue. Some-

where between 53rd Street and the Circle, Chester obeyed that impulse and allowed Helen to kiss him. Although the driver of the cab rarely allowed himself the luxury of spying on his customers, he scrapped his scruples and glanced hastily over his shoulder.

"After all," he salved his conscience, "when you're driving a cab to get material for a novel—" He made a quick note on the back of an envelope. It would fit neatly into the debauchery scene in Chapter Four. He thought pityingly of his fellow-members in the New York Hack-drivers' Literary Society. Always talking about their great epic and never getting down to it. Busy with the sporting page when they should be polishing and rewriting. He remembered with a twinge the cries of "Title thief!" which had greeted his announcement that his novel would be named "The Clutch." It had come from the old and disgruntled novelists, the notorious right wing of the group, he consoled himself. The two love-birds were too deeply engrossed to note that it demanded a heroic effort on the driver's part to wrest the cab from an ap-

proaching statue. The scene of the bout arrived too soon for all three of them.

The usual crowd was milling about in the lobby of the Arena looking for somebody with a ducat when Chester shouldered his way in with Helen. A familiar voice behind calling him by name rose above the noise of heated argument and prediction. Benny Green, pleasantly rosy, pushed forward to welcome them.

"It's a pleasure," he bowed to Helen before Chester had even opened his mouth, "I may be able to use you in my next Broadway production. If you're interested report in Atlantic City next Wednesday at eleven. Bring your rehearsal rompers and your Equity card. Say, Chester, where did you go the other afternoon? I looked all over the tub for you. Have you got tickets for this thing?"

"No, I was just going to get a couple."

"There you go again," said Benny, shaking his head sadly. "Throwing it around like it was dirt. Why don't you hang on to that jack of yours? It may be worth money some day." Benny made a

sign to two tired gentlemen who were gazing at the crowd through rust-colored glasses.

"This is Vincent Treanor and Joe Williams," he announced. He said a few rapid words to the polite pair, who obligingly produced the necessary passes, their faces wreathed in smiles at the thought of serving any reader of the "Banana Gazette," the paper they represented. Helen smiled at them.

"Are you here to see the fight to-night, Mr. Williams?" The eminent critic looked slightly startled.

"Why no, madam, I understood there was to be an exhibition of dry-point etchings."

"I—I don't understand," said Helen.

"Don't try to, lady," interposed Treanor. "Just remember to keep your right hand up, your left stuck out, and your chin hidden. And remember, up and weaving on the count of nine!"

"Lay off that phoney, madam," advised Williams. "He's never been the same since that parrot bit him down Missoura way." They bowed off and Chester, an idea taking shape in his mind, drew

Benny aside. He explained his needs hesitantly but Benny was surprisingly generous.

"Don't be foolish, of course it's all right," he said. "As long as you get it back in front of the office sometime to-morrow afternoon." He drew a dog-eared wallet from his pocket and handed Chester a card. "You better take my license in case. It's parked on 66th Street, on the right hand side just off Broadway." He waved an adieu to Helen, pressed Chester's hand, and disappeared into the Arena. They were escorted to their second row ringside seats by an usher whose refined features indicated that he was not accustomed to the work but was gathering material for a novel on prize-fighting to be called "The Clutch." He accepted Chester's tip reluctantly, "just to buy pens and paper, you understand," he explained. When Chester informed him that he was a second cousin of Doubleday Doran's Crime Club on his distaff side, the young author-usher's joy knew no bounds. He left promising to let Chester see the first ten chapters of his novel as soon as they were presentable.

It was the second round of the main event on

the evening's card and Kid Chocolate was busily avoiding the rushes of his white opponent, who seemed intent upon tossing the Cuban Bon-bon out of the ring altogether. As far as Helen could see there were only white faces discernible in the blue smoke but from above came native cries to the Kid to open up. A moment later, the gong sounded and the round was over. Now the click of telegraph instruments rose over the excited buzz of talk.

The Kid lay back on his stool, his arms extended along the ropes and his long legs stretched out before him, while an efficient lad in a dirty white sweater swung a towel vigorously. A portly gentleman was whispering anxiously in the Kid's ear.

"They expect you at 137th Street at eleven, Kid," he urged. "They're nice people now, so we don't want to disappoint them. You better flatten this mug next round. Get it over with; I told a cab to be outside at ten-thirty and if we ain't there, that meter is gonna keep on running."

"What do you suppose he's telling the colored boy, Chester?" Helen asked curiously. A puffy

sporting enthusiast next to her with a nose like a wedge of pie answered her question.

"That's the Kid's manager, ma'am," he offered. "The Kid's a peculiar guy; he can't fight unless he gets sad and his manager always tells him sad stories between rounds. Last round he told him the story of Romeo and Juliet but it wasn't strong enough. He's probably telling him 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' now. I'll never forget the time he told the Kid the story of Little Red Riding Hood. He was fighting Dempsey that time—that was when Jack was a featherweight. The Kid went crazy with grief. What a shellacking he gave Dempsey! He knocked him cold, lifted him up, and knocked him hot again."

"I thought it was Tunney that beat Dempsey," objected Helen timidly.

"That's what everybody thinks," said the expert, shaking his head. "You just wait till my book on that fight comes out. I was in Dempsey's corner that night in Chicago."

"What's the name of your book?" asked Chester.

"It's called 'The Clutch,' " responded the puffy gentleman; simultaneously came the warning five-second whistle announcing the third round. The gong sounded and the Kid's white opponent was already across the floor. He lunged a right into the chocolate ribs and closed. The Kid grunted and stepped back. His left hand darted out three times quickly. The answering bark from the gallery surprised Helen until she noticed that the right eye of the white boy was closed.

The latter came in flailing wildly but the Kid was stepping nimbly out of reach. The crowd sensed a kill in the Kid's wary avoidance of those enraged lunges; here and there taut spectators on their feet begged the black boy tearfully to "smear him, smack him!" The Kid seemed to be in no hurry, stepping easily out of reach and dodging the abortive haymakers of the Aryan. Once again the white hope tore in, his lips drawn back in a half snarl. The Kid tapped him lightly about the body with that seemingly harmless left, changing it now and then for a casual jab at his chin. A slow roar was swelling out of the gallery. Almost every one was on his feet now. The Kid stepped

back, only to dart in again with his left. The white boy swung a desperate right and uncovered his jaw. The Kid's right hand moved eight inches. The fight was over.

The Kid smiled and raised both hands to the receptive crowd acclaiming him. He stepped in when the referee had straightened up from the inert figure on the floor and assisted in the pleasant job of transferring the loser to his own corner. His manager was waiting for him with dressing-gown held open and impatience evident on his face.

"Hustle, Kid, grab a shower. That cab is out there clicking off nickels." As the black favorite climbed through the ropes a languid second was pressing a water-soaked sponge to the forehead of the victim who, had anybody taken the trouble to listen, might have been heard mumbling "What the hell, it's an easy six hundred, 's better than working."

Helen and Chester found themselves in a mad rush for the exit; the four or five moody spectators who had remained were coroners' assistants and disgruntled small-fry pickpockets. The filtered air of Manhattan was refreshing after the

fetid smoke and noise. Helen was obviously disappointed.

"Well," she remarked, "I guess that's all for the nonce."

"Oh, I'd hardly call him that," smiled Chester. "Still, it did look as though he was a set-up for the Kid." They were walking slowly down a line of cars and Chester, who was searching anxiously for Benny's roadster, was beginning to wonder whether there hadn't been some slip in his plans when he suddenly saw it parked across the street. Helen was an interesting picture of mingled appreciation and mystification.

"You're not an auto-thief or anything like that, are you, darling?"

"No, it's all part of a trick," enlightened Chester. "But there's one more prop I need and where am I going to find it?"

"What's that?" she asked blankly.

"A haystack." Chester was busy with a cigarette, possibly on purpose.

"You're joking," accused Helen after a moment of perplexed scrutiny of his face. Her swain's

slow look of wounded pride reassured her. "But what on earth—?"

"Now, now, now," reproved Chester. "Here I spend time and money building up the spectacle of the ages and right in the middle of it you start asking questions. I ask you, is this my act or do I have to see the manager?"

"It's yours, honey," she acquiesced dutifully. There was a moment of silence while she thoughtfully drank a sizable draught from the still plentiful supply of sours. "But where are we going to find a haystack? Ask a policeman perhaps?" There was something about this appealing young man and his deft chemistry of whiskey sours which made remonstrance unladylike.

"Jersey is full of haystacks," suggested Chester insidiously.

"Don't be insidious with me, Chester!" reproved Helen. "If it's to be Jersey, then up, men, and macadam!" Nobody was more surprised than herself at this Grade B sally. The car started determinedly toward the west side and the unmapped wilderness of Jersey. Halts demanded by traffic lights served admirably for frequent consultations

of the two remaining flasks. Helen was now and then reminding herself that after all she knew nothing at all about Chester—and rather liked it. It had been a long time since this little girl had done anything dangerous, the little girl reflected happily. Chester himself was too busy keeping the car off the sidewalks of New York to analyze his own feelings very well; he was conscious, however, of an overpowering good-will toward all, a dreamy tenderness toward Helen, and a hazy cluster of lights approaching which meant the Holland Tunnel. They sped accurately and swiftly past the detached gardenias of the law, each busily engaged at his own post blocking out his novel of conditions in Tammany to be called "The Clutch." Chester regretted that it was impossible to pause at the junction of New York and New Jersey to pour a libation on the altar of good-will, but the time element was present and rearing its ugly head.

"You don't happen to know which way we're going, do you?" asked Helen, after nearly fifty miles of the asphalt ribbon beneath them had un-

wound. "This is great fun but these road tests are beginning to tell on me."

"Maybe this is a sign post," said Chester slowing down. "I've heard of one in Jersey somewhere. Why, sure enough!" The cuneiform characters revealed that they were equidistant from Montclair, East Orange, Pompton Lakes, Wanaque and Midvale. Chester decided on Pompton Lakes for no good reason except its impressive sound and they were off again. A shrill whistle grew louder behind them and they heard another motor above the hum of theirs.

"Over to the side of the road, you," came the motorcycle cop's voice. Chester, obedient and disgusted, did as ordered. "Sixty miles an hour, hey? You can't do that in Jersey. Come on, show me your license." The bulldog of the law peered at it in the circle of his pocket flash. "Where the hell do you think you're going, anyway? How would you like to be pinched?"

"I'd rather be goosed, officer," said Chester in a carefully low tone, and added, somewhat louder, "You see, we're eloping."

"But that's DIFFERENT!" cried the officer

delightedly. "Why didn't you say so right away? Do you need a witness?"

"Well, no," replied Chester. "You see, sir, we've gone so far without help and I thought—well, I sort of thought it would be more manly to play the game out alone," he finished embarrassed.

"That's the right spirit, my boy," commended the policeman. "And speaking of games, can you take 'skiing' with an 's'?" Helen and Chester racked their brains in vain.

"'Kissing'!" cried the officer, clapping his hands delightedly. "Did it stump you?" he questioned eagerly. "Because I know some easier ones. Now take 'malnutrition' with a 'g', or 'marsupial' with a 'k'. Or—"

"Pardon me, is there a haystack around here, mister?" intruded Helen.

"Aw, you don't want to play," murmured the cop plaintively. "That's the way it always is with you bored New Yorkers. You give me the needles, always looking for your haystacks." They apologized for interrupting him but he was petulant.

"All right," he pouted. "If you must know, there's a farm six miles up the line. And I hope

the haystack falls on your foot," he added spitefully as they left him. He did not even wave as they rounded a turn in the road.

"Keep an eye out for cows, Helen," instructed Chester. "There's bound to be hay hanging around a cow."

"Which came first, Chester, the hay or the cow?" queried Helen from his shoulder. "I feel awfully peculiar. I must have eaten something that didn't agree with me."

"Or drunk something that did," corrected Chester. It was cooler now and Chester was cursing a fate which always left hundreds of haystacks all over the place when you didn't want them and hid them when you needed them most. A few moments later a succession of stone fences was dimly apparent.

"Let's get out here, honey," he prompted. "That looks like a field." It was a fortunate guess. It *was* a field, and more than that, there was a genuine haystack peeping coyly at them in the distance.

"My word, are those COWS?" breathed Helen

pointing to a number of dark forms. "I haven't seen cows for years!"

"Here, bossy," wheedled Chester holding out his hand. The forms did not move, mainly because they were rocks. Somewhat unsteadily Chester and Helen approached the haystack. Some fifty feet to leeward a couple of authentic cows *were* watching them in astonishment. After ten minutes the more distinguished of the two—a Holstein by her seventh marriage—shook her head sadly.

"These city folk are queer people, Beryl," she observed. "Now you never saw any farmer do that to a haystack."

"Haven't I though?" said her companion, a Guernsey. "You just wait till you read the last chapter of my novel on farm life called 'The Clutch'." The other chewed her cud comfortably and pondered.

"No good'll come of it," she decided finally. "You better put in your time sewing or bringing up a family instead of wasting good paper. It's all been said before."

"Not the way I'll say it," promised the Guern-

sey. "You wait and see. Oh boy, it'll knock them into the aisles!"

"Stop your jawing and go to bed," advised her partner. "Remember, Life is a round of pleasure for our sons only. We've got work to do!" She yawned and stretched. "Did you wind the alarm?"

"Yes, and left a note for the milkman," reported the other. "I guess you're right; there's nothing around here to keep us up. Sweet dreams!" But her companion was already fast asleep.



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CHAPTER X

Moussorgsky springs full-blown from the head of Zeus, hoist by his own petard - Tales told of Shem and Shaun - I bury a banana, Holmes and Brandeis dissenting - I divorce Coolidge and marry Sainte-Beuve - I give myself to a half-caste Parsee - Ah, sweet mystery of life!

ALMOST two hours before, the Boston Express had emerged from the echoing tunnels of Grand Central into the exclusive upper Park Avenue section. The Harlem River bridge, flung across the greenish slime which bounds Manhattan on the north, had faded into the ensuing forest of lumber yards and coal elevators; New Rochelle, Mount Vernon, Pelham Manor and Rye were dim names seen fleetingly above languid stations spotted with Fords and gaping natives in shirt-sleeves. Chester yawned dispiritedly over an interminable

serial and stared vacantly at the flat landscape surrounding the roadbed of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad. At his side Rolf Weatherbee, who had already exhausted the subjects of Lou Gehrig's batting average, the farmer who was forced to spend a night at the traveling-salesman's house, football prospects, and the sad business of call money, was chuckling obnoxiously over last week's copy of "Life." Now and then he was overcome with guffaws of laughter and read liberal excerpts, explaining the cartoons painstakingly. Chester wondered what had ever possessed him to accept Rolf's urgent appeals to accompany him to Little Congo and finally blamed it on his low resistance. The three preceding days of warm weather had made the thought of a rural weekend not only bearable but decidedly attractive.

"Ah ha ha ha!" bawled Rolf, suddenly writhing up from his studious examination of the cream of American humor. "Chester, get a load of this one: '*She*: Why do you work so hard? '*He*: Because I'm too nervous to steal!' How do these birds think them up?"

Chester squirmed in his chair at the prospect of two whole days of laughter chaperoned by Rolf. As if to goad him still further, the train had slowed down and was crawling heavily across an endless viaduct of some sort imbedded in a vast marsh. In the distance three battered cows of brown wood from which the paint had scaled tempted the traveler to dally with a Hershey bar. He shuddered. Rolf, stymied by the crossword puzzles, threw down his magazine and turned to the absorbing matter of stocks.

"I tell you, Chester," he said confidentially, "get down on Radio, you take my advice. And listen: the last hasn't been heard of those airplane securities, mark my words."

"I've already marked them," growled Chester, "the best I can give you is a D, so why don't you pipe down and let me get some sleep?"

"Sleep? Why, that's all you're going to do when we get up to Little Congo!" He was off again on the theme of his favorite Massachusetts watering-place. "You just wait till you see that place. Prettiest little town there is, and quiet? Why, you can hear a pin drop!"

"I've heard pins drop," replied Chester unmoved.

"But you'll love this place," pursued Rolf relentlessly. "No taxis shooting out of sidestreets or riveting going on all day long! You'll love it!" He went into a long panegyric on the natural beauties of Little Congo, the bees, the birds and the flowers. Chester suddenly began wishing that he were back where the taxis shot out of sidestreets and the riveting went on all day long. Two days. . . . Maybe he could plead insanity and sneak away sooner. The train passed a field dotted with haystacks and he thought vaguely of Helen, reproaching himself because "nice girl" seemed to be the best he could summon up. Wendy and Lila were already blurred outlines, incidents between drinks. He almost wished some one would step up and call him a cad or something despicable. Meanwhile, Rolf had passed from the bees and flowers into a description of his mother's home, the people next door, the quaint old woman who ran the postoffice and other totally uninteresting matters.

"You never met my wife, Chester," he said. "I

know you'll like her, I mean she's really great." Chester looked up at what was obviously a hollow ring in his voice. Rolf seemed slightly embarrassed; he hesitated for a moment and then said, "I'll tell you a little secret, that is, if you won't . . ."

"You know me, Rolf." The latter hesitated and finally blurted out, "Well, hardly anybody knows it, but—of course this is just between you and me—this is my second marriage." If he had expected Chester to bolt out of his seat he was mistaken.

"Well, go on, what of it?" Chester was calm. "Plenty of people have been married before."

"I know, Chester, but this is different," explained Rolf quickly. "Right after graduation I married a chorus girl and we stayed drunk for two weeks. It was great while it lasted but when the old man heard it . . . Oh mammy! In two days he had the marriage annulled and everything hushed up."

"But what about the girl? Didn't she have something to say?"

"You can't say things to my old man. She was

Parlor, Bedlam and Bath

a nice kid but try to tell the old boy that." Chester was instinctively sorry for anybody who would try to tell Rolf's old man anything.

"Did you ever see her again?"

"Oh sure, I ran into her about a year ago and got her a very good job," returned Rolf in his maddening way. "I see her now and then, call her up, you know." He decided that he must have said too much; Chester wagged a reproving finger and smiled archly.

"You won't say anything about this, will you, Chester?" Weatherbee begged. "I never told anybody and if something should slip out at the house ..."

"Certainly not," promised Chester, "well, well, you gay deceiver you. To think that ..." Rolf was so obviously uncomfortable that he desisted. "Let's go into the gentlemen's collapsing-room and have a cigarette."

The three inevitable traveling-men looked up from their mounds of cigar-ash at Chester and Rolf as they entered and disposed themselves. Chester's cigarette was half gone when a very fat man cleared his throat huskily and addressed him.

Kentucky Mountain Fugue

"It's a nice day, friend."

"I won't argue," said Chester politely. The fat man, baffled, shrugged his shoulders and began brushing ashes off his vest. One of his companions, a thin individual with a high collar and horn-rimmed glasses, spat waveringly into a spittoon which wasn't there and tried his luck.

"Haven't I met you somewhere before?"

"No," said Chester. "I'm district sales manager of Snyder, Chisholm, Joyce and Zilinsky in their Pennsylvania territory. I've been there eight years."

"I've never been in Pennsylvania," said the thin man.

"That's too bad," sympathized Chester, "you'd love Pennsylvania. Run down some day and let me show you over it."

"What's your line?"

"Lisle hose without clocks," responded Chester, "or maybe hardware. Or even cardboard sperms. I'm the man you always meet, the man who knew Coolidge, the face in the subway, the boy in the bush." The thin man's jaw sagged three-quarters of an inch and he looked hastily at his partners.

It was the medium-sized man's turn. He was anxious to make friends.

"Speaking of stories, have you heard the one about the . . ."

"Yes, and it's great," smiled Chester. "As a matter of fact, that reminds me of one I heard not long ago. Like to hear it?" The three merchants had not heard it but their eyes were almost tear-filled with desire to become acquainted.

"Well, it seems—it seems—" Chester paused regretfully. "Oh dear, I'm afraid I've forgotten it." The three puzzled gentlemen looked uneasily at each other. Rolf, too, was baffled, but as he was in a perpetual state of embarrassment, it didn't matter much.

"My line is suspenders," the fat man ventured to Rolf after an interval. Rolf slowly opened his mouth to speak; everybody waited but nothing happened.

"Don't mind my friend, he's asleep," apologized Chester.

"But his eyes are open," objected the medium-sized man.

"What of it?" said Chester, "he has shoes on

his feet but he's not walking." The three pondered this for a while in vain. The suspender salesman decided to fall back on his calling.

"I've got the lousiest line of suspenders on the market," he complained. "I don't see why any one ever buys them. It's a gyp."

"Same with my ladies' fountain pens," added the thin man. "I could be arrested if the Government ever knew how they leak. They ought to put a stop to selling fountain pens like mine."

"I used to work for the Gibraltar line," offered the suspensician. "There was a suspender! Strong as Gibraltar they were. That's why they called them Gibraltar suspenders. Get it?"

"I get it," replied Chester. The only way to keep these people quiet was to talk himself, he decided. He fixed the hawker of suspenders with his eye.

"Have you ever heard of Wilberforce Tattersall?"

"I—I—" began the fat man.

"You should have," said Chester, determined to brook no interruption, "you certainly should have. He invented suspenders, and if it wasn't for him,

you'd be a day-laborer instead of a captain of finance." The fat man looked around at his companions and then at the door. Chester leaned over nearer and narrowed his eyes. "Gentlemen, you may care to know that Wilberforce Tattersall was a grandfather of mine by marriage. He and eleven others were related to my grandfather through my grandmother. You understand?"

"It's—I—" began the fat man preparing to rise.

"Please," said Chester haughtily, "*please*. I was just beginning my story." The fat man blushed slightly and remained where he was, helplessly fidgeting in his seat. "It all took place," resumed Chester, "in West Virginia in the hill-billy district. It was just before the war—the Civil War, may I say. Wilberforce and his brother Poultney had come into the hills seeking their fortune. Between them they owned only one horse and a pair of blankets. They were yarn-unravelers by trade but you will readily admit that there was little opportunity for them to ply their calling back in those hills. The mountaineers were a hardy lot; in

fact, one look at them and you would be apt to say 'What a hardy lot.' "

"I know, I've been there," cut in the fat man timidly. "They're a hardy lot, those mountaineers." Chester quieted him with a glance.

"You can say what you will of those mountaineers, gentlemen," he waved his hand deprecatingly, "but they had their code of morals. They were, as I have said, a hardy lot, but two things they held sacred; their horses and their women. They had all cut a throat now and then in a moment of red anger, but they loved their horses and their women. Rough and untutored they were, I grant you, but kind of heart and generous to a fault. Do I make myself clear?" He fixed a ferocious glance upon the three and they nodded nervously.

"Wilberforce and Poultney had one horse and no woman. The pair of blankets was a mute reproach and a reminder every time they saw either. They resolved to help themselves to both horse and woman, never dreaming that the enraged mountaineers would scour the ends of the earth to find the culprit and then hang him to the near-

est sapling by his own belt. One night Wilberforce and Poultney sneaked into the farmhouse of one of the wealthier residents and grabbed his horse and his woman. The owner was away and his wife, a plump young thing, did not need much grabbing. She was rather fed up with her husband, in fact, due to his long-ingrained habit of chewing tobacco in bed. Do any of you gentlemen chew tobacco in bed?" he demanded suddenly and loudly.

None of the gentlemen chewed tobacco in bed.

"Wilberforce and the willing abductee boarded the stolen horse," recommenced Chester during an interval of silence during which the stupefied trio shifted feet restlessly. "Poultney, God rest his soul, followed them on his own mare. The poor animal, slightly spavined, was no help by the time the infuriated hillsmen were on the track. Wilberforce and his prizes got away but Poultney swung from a convenient tree by his belt before Apollo had driven his fiery chariot into the east. After a few days, Wilberforce ventured into a distant town to garner supplies for himself and the fair roommate secreted in a cave in the hills. Here he

learned the fate which had overtaken his brother, and sad at heart, returned to brood and to breed." Chester paused; the three salesmen had not moved a muscle. He slowly took out a cigarette and tapped it dramatically.

"Time passed, and Wilberforce, tired of being a caveman, by forced night marches at last gained the security of a fertile valley and an opportunity to return to his trade of unraveling yarn. He knew from the assurances of his blonde moll that the mountaineers would some day find him out, and he racked his brain to discover something which would enable him to throw away his belt yet support his corduroys. He realized increasingly that his neck even more than his pants hung on that belt. For two years . . . two years, gentlemen . . . Wilberforce labored using every possible substitute he could think of. For three months he worked on a varnish with which he glued his trousers to his middle, only to find that he had to soak them off again. And then, one night, like a melody from out of the sky, came The Idea. The first crude suspenders, made of creepers, were too bulky. Heart-rending disappointments swamped

him at every turn. But a Tattersall goes down fighting, and although Wilberforce grew gaunt and hollow-cheeked from nights of research, he kept on grimly. At last, from the diphthongs of cows, Wilberforce fashioned a new pair of suspenders, pliant, tough and—you will pardon me for using your term, sir—strong as Gibraltar. Stronger, even. He prepared for the test with beating heart, and lo! his effort was rewarded! The pants rode proudly about his waist, supported by the fantastic invention. Wilberforce Tattersall had invented the Suspender!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the fat man enthusiastically.

"Shut up," silenced Chester coldly. "It was just in time. Two days later the avenging horde tied its horses to his fence and strode in on him. They collared Wilberforce but when they looked for his belt they realized that for once their victim had outwitted them. With hanging heads and a backward envious glance at the blonde charmer they returned to the hills." The three listeners sighed deeply and stretched themselves. The thin man

was already on his feet when Chester's command sent him back into his seat.

"Sit down, you," he ordered contemptuously. "Then came the War and bugles blared in the land whilst many a tear-stained son kissed his tall young mother good-by as she resolutely set off for the easy pickings back of the lines. Three weeks later the Johnny Rebs fired on Fort Sumter and a young Union corporal named General Sherman sipped his glass of thomas beer in his barracks and dreamed dreams. This was war, men, none of your child's-play. In time the news penetrated to Wilberforce and inspiration again beckoned to him. Two weeks later, behind locked doors, Wilberforce unfolded his plan to President Lincoln. The Great Emancipator nodded from the depths of his shawl. Tattersall's plan was not only feasible but ingenious; and when the second batch of Union spies equipped with replicas of the Tattersall suspender, made their report to Washington, *not one of them had met with the fate of the first company*, all of whom dangled by their own belts from the nearest birch. Then came peace, and the plowshares were being beaten into paper money again.

Wilberforce rode the wave and laid the foundation of the great Tattersall fortune on the just rewards of his labor." But the fat man could endure it no longer. He rose to his feet and clutched his hat wildly as the train slowed down.

"I'm getting off here," he announced in a trembling falsetto, "I—you—"

"But my dear man, this is only Mystic, Connecticut," protested Chester.

"It may be only Mystic to you but it's where I get off," quavered the suspensician, "and if you gents take my advice you'll do likewise." With repeated backward glances, the three drummers disappeared into the car and gathered up their bags. Chester saw them scurry down the platform looking apprehensively to see whether he was pursuing them. Rolf, rubbing his eyes, sat up and rubbed his eyes. Chester looked at him morosely.

"Are we there?" Rolf asked foggily. As his companion made no reply, Rolf peered out sleepily. Then he yawned hugely while Chester counted his fillings. He almost decided to remind Rolf to attend to that little cavity in the major incisor but he was too overcome with boredom to attempt

banter. He looked at his watch; two-fifteen and they were due at four-thirty.

"Chester!" Rolf was suddenly animated. "I forgot! The Scotch!"

"The what?"

"The Scotch! I took along a bottle in my bag." He rushed out and Chester shook his head despairingly. Only Rolf could pull something like that. Three hours on a train and he hadn't thought of the bottle probably lying on top of the shirts. The porter hustled in with set-ups and a few minutes later Chester had to admit he felt better.

"I only hope he keeps quiet," he thought, looking at Rolf lying back sipping his drink. As if to bait him, Rolf put down his glass.

"You'll have a great time in Little Congo, Chester," he assured, "too bad you can't meet my mother and Dad. They've been up in the White Mountains for the past two weeks, coming home end of next week. But you'll get on great with my sister, she's a good kid, I really mean it, full of pep." Chester had for years loathed the word "pep" to the point of nausea, and had Rolf known

it, he would have used it anyway; he was that kind, tactful. Outside the insipid landscape rolled by; the world's dreariest countryside, the southern New England states, greeted Chester's tired eye. He reflected that they would have to change at Providence for a local into Massachusetts and he wished that he had remembered to bring his raincoat. It would be raining in Providence; it always rained there, no matter what the weather was elsewhere. That was why it was Providence. The recollection of several horrible weekends he had spent at some Baptist college or other there made him shiver. Hundreds of definitely blond "collegians" with doughy faces, being very smooth and quite hard. . . . The train tilted and ground to a stop. Westerly. They were in Rhode Island. the Nutmeg State.

Rolf talked on, principally about current events. The nightmare of the next hour finally ended with their arrival at the capital of the Nutmeg State. Oddly enough, it was not raining and the natives were gathered about in clusters peering at the sky in amazement. Half an hour later they were jolting along in the Little Congo local,

pillowing their heads in the cinder-covered red plush upholstery of a day-coach. The slight uplift of the liquor had disappeared and Chester found himself at ten minutes past four in the afternoon totally depressed and anticipating his holiday in the bosom of Mamma Nature without the slightest bit of relish. Rolf's excitement at nearing his wonder village was so keen that he had again fallen asleep. Nineteen minutes later the engineer in the cab ahead wiped his face and reached for the clutch. It was just in time, for Chester, nearer homicide than he had ever been in his life, was reaching for his Gladstone bag to stuff it down Rolf's snoring kisser.



CHAPTER XI

The revolt on the Soochow Express - A few thigs from fistles - In which I learn that Anna might marry an An-namite - The copper king throws Sibyl smelting glances - A warrant is sworn out in the Swahili tongue - Gathering clouds.

THE palsied Little Congo local stopped shaking and sighed against the gravel path of the station. A chauffeur who had been curled up with his feet on the Gobelin tapestry of a Ford station wagon yawned and idly buttoned his tunic, richly embroidered with greenish grease. Then he took out a small pocket comb and ran it through his hair. It was time for another henna rinse, his reflection in the windshield told him; he should have had it on his day off last week but he and the under-gardener's wife had spent their leave

The Hermit Speaks

shopping around for a gift for her husband. They had finally decided on a pair of horns, a beautiful set of branching antlers which they were sure would be just the thing. And after all their trouble to act the way he did, stamping and bellowing all those foul innuendoes at the top of his voice! He had finally quieted down but only when Sanford had taken away his pitchfork, locked him in the stable, and sent for the Little Congo constable. Well, he was in the county jail where he belonged and Sanford glowed as he recalled the words of the officer congratulating him on capturing a dangerous maniac. Next Tuesday he would be arraigned on charges of wife-beating, assault with intent to kill, possession of weapons, and whatever other counts his wife and Sanford could think up by that time. Yes, everything had turned out nicely, he thought, putting away his comb. He had sunk so completely into his reverie that he did not notice that the train had left almost three minutes before.

"I say, SANFORD!" Rolf cleared his throat for the fifth time. Sanford, startled, looked up suddenly, then bounded across the gravel quickly.

"I was oiling the carburetor, Mr. Rolf," he apologized. "The engine was roaring so loud I didn't hear you. Have you been here long?"

"Only about twenty minutes," cut in Chester blackly. "Do you oil the carburetor with a pocket comb?" Sanford shot him a look of concentrated hatred and kicked Chester's bag viciously as they moved off toward the Weatherbee guest coach.

"This is our station wagon, Chester," explained Rolf importantly. "We use it just to run down to the station with; of course we have several other cars besides this one."

"Of course, of course," agreed Chester with no attempt to conceal the bite in his tone. "I suppose you have a special ice wagon for running down to the ice-house." His words were punctuated by the crash of his suitcase in the rear seat. Chester turned just in time to prevent Sanford from hurling a jack at the bag. The chauffeur threw the car surlily into gear and they raced through the one street past the comatose grocery store and postoffice.

"That's a nice driver you've got there," commented Chester, "have you had him long?"

"Oh, all our help stay with us a long time," replied Rolf. "We've got one fellow's been with us seven years. This driver here's still on parole."

"On parole?" demanded Chester blankly.

"Sure, he's an ex-convict," said Rolf calmly. "All our help comes from the state prison." Chester stared at him uncomprehendingly. "The old man's nuts on prison reform. He finds out a man's record and then hires him for the rest of his term. That way the guy gets his liberty, plenty to eat and a good place to sleep."

"How much does your old man give them?" asked Chester, after a thoughtful moment.

"Well, this one here gets ten dollars a month but some of them get up to fifteen," boasted Rolf. "They really don't need much money out here in the country and the old man says it keeps them out of mischief. Yes sir, some of them have been with us for years; couldn't get them to leave on a bet."

"But what happens if they want a raise or try to quit?"

"They can't quit," went on Rolf, "the old man just flashes their prison record on them and tells

them he'll shove them back in jail. He raises them five dollars every Christmas." Chester looked at him intently.

"I'd like to meet your father sometime," he said with emphasis, "he must be a cutie." Rolf beamed.

"You said it! Nobody can put anything over on my old man! I wish I had his business instinct."

"I shouldn't be surprised if you have," responded Chester. The conversation languished as they rapidly left the few houses of the village and descended a long hill into the open country. Rolf was taking deep breaths and Chester feared for a moment that his friend was about to pound his chest like Tarzan.

"Oh boy, smell that air!"

"Smell it yourself," ground Chester irritably. Only a churl could have failed to appreciate the magnificent flat scenery with its growth of stunted poison sumac bushes and sandbanks. To Chester it was just another hunk of dirt but to Rolf it was home. In his mind's eye, Chester saw Rolf, the growing boy, furtively skulking in those patches of sand playing his youthful games. Probably a

chicken-stealer and petty thief as a youth, he decided. No, that took too much imagination for Rolf. He was probably some sort of subnormal, a Peeping Tom perhaps.

"Two miles more and we're there," observed Rolf. They turned down a side road and the character of the countryside began to change. Within the next mile, they passed into a wooded sector containing four or five depressing rococo wooden houses. The idea of being alone in a household staffed with second-story men and box workers occurred to Chester; he began to fidget. They passed a rambling estate which Rolf pointed to with pride.

"That's Freckles' place," he announced, "Eugene Freckles, the Beet Sugar King, you know. Personal friend of my old man, plays golf with him." Inasmuch as Chester had never heard of either beet sugar or Freckles, the point was obscure. Finally, when Chester was at what he considered the lowest ebb of his life, they turned into a driveway. An extensive two-story Colonial house with a vine-clad porch commanded a slight rise in the ground. In the background, the usual array of

barns and garages revealed itself, nestling under several particularly fine elms. They drove toward the house through carefully trimmed rose-bushes and came to a stop before the porch. Rolf sighed deeply.

"Well, it's a long trip but you must admit it's worth it."

"Must I?" murmured Chester tonelessly. His contempt for Rolf was gone; he felt completely beaten. The handkerchief in his breast pocket was ben-dayed a dark gray with the soot of four states and his neck ached. The malevolent chauffeur dropped his bag with a thud on the cinder path and placed his foot heavily on it. A snarl on his face invited Chester to complain. Rolf, thoughtful as ever, bounded up the steps and disappeared into the house.

"Hey, you forget your bag," growled Sanford as Chester slowly prepared to follow him.

"Aren't you bringing it in?"

"What do you think I am, a god-damned governess?" scowled Sanford, moving nearer Chester. "Listen, baby . . ." Chester, in no mood to swap pleasantries, reached for his suitcase. The chauffeur

feur shrugged his shoulders and decided not to knife him. He would save that for old man Weatherbee when the latter returned from his trip. Chester, turning the handle of the front door, heard the screech of brakes being stripped as Sanford gently started the station wagon.

He hesitated in the silent hall, waiting for voices, but the entire house seemed deserted. It was just like Rolf to scurry off somewhere and take a bath without introducing him to anybody. He bent over angrily to pick up his bag again. When he looked up the blood turned to ice-water in his veins and an overpowering weakness bordering on nausea ascended from his knees. A young lady was standing in the doorway looking at Chester with eyes in which terror and stupefaction were playing tag with each other. For almost two minutes Chester and Helen stood there while the color drained slowly out of his face and into hers. The bag lay on the floor where it had dropped from Chester's nerveless fingers. He felt the perspiration start out on his forehead and trickle down the side of his nose. Helen, understandably, was the

first to regain control. He wondered how she managed to keep her voice steady when she spoke.

"So you're Rolf's friend." Chester's mouth was coated with flannel and his tongue waved idly about his teeth.

"Helen . . . what are you doing here, for God's sake?" The bag caught between his feet as he attempted to step forward. "Don't tell me . . ." Helen put up her hand to steady his, which was trembling. She turned hastily and Chester followed her glassily into the living room. She sank into an armchair, her eyes averted.

"I might have known it," she said after a moment. "The one man I pick out . . ."

"But Helen, what . . ."

"Don't you know who I am?" A deep ruby color was invading Chester's face and when her next sentence came, he recoiled almost two feet and gaped at her with open mouth. Then, when the full import of what she had said dawned on him, he realized how a cream puff must feel after three days in the sun.

"Good Christ . . ." he said finally. "Holy jumping . . ."

"Never mind," Helen interrupted. "What on earth are we going to DO?"

"But listen," Chester was still recovering from his shock, "how should I—how in hell should I know you were Rolf's wife? You never . . ."

"Chester, PLEASE!" Helen was tense. "Don't let's bother about that NOW! Rolf . . ." They heard footsteps in the hall behind them and Rolf bustled in breezily.

"Helen, I'm sorry . . . Why, Chester, where did you go to?" An almost childish wonderment occupied him as he turned to his friend. "Why, what's the matter, Chester?"

"Nothing . . . I guess I . . ."

"I know, the trip," agreed Rolf sympathetically. "I went upstairs and washed. Helen, this is Chester Tattersall. Chester, I want you to know the best little pal any man ever had—my wife." The unconscious irony of the last sentence was lost on both Chester and the best little pal. Helen nodded and Chester mumbled some horribly inane remark. The roaring in his ears had subsided to a screech when the negro in the white coat coughed discreetly.

"Cocktails, Mrs. Weatherbee." Chester could have fallen on his neck with joy. Rolf busily passed the drinks and settled himself fatly into a deep chair.

"Oh boy," he said with emphasis, "what a change after the hot city! Say, Helen, it's lucky you came out here when you did. They're dying like flies down there in New York!" It was an original simile but hardly exact. Rolf however was already busy with another topic.

"And that table over there is three hundred years old," he pursued, "real Duncan Phyfe. Goes with the settee, that's Phyfe too. That piece cost forty-six thousand dollars. The fireplace . . ."

"Yes, yes, dear," soothed Helen, whose return to the status quo seemed to have been aided considerably by her cocktail, "why don't you take Mr. Tattersall upstairs and show him his room?"

"Good idea," agreed Rolf. "You take a shower and hop into some comfortable clothes, what say, Chester?" Chester rose uncertainly and put down his glass. He looked quickly at Helen, who was studying a crack in the floor and running a fever. Rolf took Chester's arm and they went into the

hall. On the staircase, Rolf insisted that Chester pause and examine the fan-light over the front door. His visitor was still too dazed to even make the polite comments.

"Your bedroom's up here," observed Rolf as they went down the spacious airy hall, "right across from the kid sister." He opened the door and ushered Chester into the guest chamber, a large square room with a plain but obviously expensive bed, a Colonial dresser and two chairs. "Now hurry up, I'll be downstairs with Helen." Chester walked slowly over to the windows and brushed aside the dimity curtains. His mind was too confused yet to attempt any coherent reasoning. One thing was obvious—something had to be done. He might go down to the village in the morning and send a telegram to himself at the Weatherbees' recalling him to New York. But this evening! He groaned as he thought of the clammy attempts at conversation that must be made, the inevitable double meanings. . . . A soft knock at the door. Chester gritted his teeth. It was the negro with his bag.

"Mr. Weatherbee sen' me up heah with yo' bag, suh. Is they anything . . . ?"

"No, thanks." The boy bowed out smiling, but Chester recalled him.

"Wait a minute, George . . . Where's the shower?"

"Why, tha's right across from yo' room, suh," indicated the servant. "Right over theh." Chester looked past him at the two doors side by side.

"But I thought Mr. Weatherbee said that was his sister's room." The negro laughed.

"No, he don' mean *that* one," he said pointing to the door on the left. "Tha's the showuh; Miss Lila's got *this* one."

"Miss WHO?" shouted Chester. The negro started and stared at him with eyeballs floating in a soft cream wash streaked with red.

"Why, Miss Lila," he stammered, "Mr. Rolf's sistuh, f'm N'Yawk. She's been up heah since yes-tiddy. She's in huh room now." The door slammed in his face. Chester, leaning against it from the inside, felt for the second time in ten minutes as if a steam-roller had gone over him. He stared at the dresser, thinking rapidly. No, it was too ab-

surd. It was a common enough name. There must be a thousand girls named Lila in New York, two thousand, twenty thousand. But what if . . . Chester suddenly remembered that he had never known Lila's last name. His mind darted back to the St. Patrick's Day parade . . . Why, of course, Lila Winter. He smiled wanly and shook his head. What a fool he was, what a dope. For a moment he almost felt better till he remembered Helen downstairs. There was no mistake about Helen. Cautiously he opened the door and looked across at the right-hand one opposite. He leaned on the frame, thinking. Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad this evening. He could spend all the time talking to Lila Weatherbee if she wasn't too much like her brother. Helen would know how to act. It would be pretty ticklish even at that. He drew back as the door across from his opened.

Afterward Chester used to wonder how he had ever managed to keep himself from fainting, and he usually ended by recalling that the negro's "Miss Lila" must have prepared him. Certainly it lessened the force of the cold bath which drenched him when Lila Winter stopped in her own door-

way with a sharp intake of breath and stared at him.

"Oh my God!" mumbled Chester, "what have I done?" Lila's eyes opened, shut and opened again. She began to laugh.

"Chester—of all people!" He crossed the hall and pushed her back into her room, closing the door behind him.

"Listen, Lila, stop laughing! This is horrible—you don't know . . . For pity's sake, what on earth—why didn't you SAY Rolf . . ." She smiled at him, then went off into continued weak laughter. Chester regarded her bitterly.

"My *dear!*" She dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief. "But I always call myself Lila Winter in New York! The old man made me change it when I became an art student. Don't you know? I'm the family skeleton!" Chester threw her a single glance into which was packed all the venom still left in him and bolted out of the door. Across his shoulder he grated, "I'll see you later downstairs!" He locked the door of his room and sat down on the bed. Everything was over now. Two of them in the same house, two Weatherbees with

but a single thought. Rolf was too stupid to be able to see anything, but Helen! And Rolf's aunt, some hawk-nosed old New England spinster who would probably watch him beadily all evening and see everything . . . He sprang to the window and threw up the sash. It was a good fifteen feet to the ground. Still . . . The other window, maybe. Exultantly he perceived a long drainpipe within four feet of the sill. He balanced himself gingerly on the edge of the window and reached for the pipe. A moment and he had swung out, clutching at it with his nails. The pipe creaked, gave slightly, but Providence was giving him a break at last. He swarmed down oblivious of his clothes and the rust tearing at his hands. Seven feet from the bottom he dropped into the soft earth of a flower-bed. The branches of a syringa bush caught in his coat but Chester ripped them away in a frenzy. Some twenty feet away Sanford, his mouth open, was watching him, a pair of pruning shears in his hand. The chauffeur swallowed hard and then raised his hand.

"Say, where the hell you think . . ."

"Shhh—" placated Chester, "pipe down—not

so loud! Listen, buddy," he fumbled in his inside pocket and brought out several bills, "can you get me down to that station in two minutes? There's twenty bucks in it for you." He dangled the bills nervously in front of Sanford's nose. The surprised ex-con, who had not seen so much money in six years, melted like snow before the notes and the plea in Chester's eyes. He was a blood brother of Chester and he knew that questions are sometimes embarrassing. He winked craftily.

"Sneak up to the garage in back and wait for me at the side door," he whispered, "I'll get the station wagon and pick you up. Now watch yourself!" Chester, hugging the side of the house, slunk to the rear and behind the hedges which led to the garage. A second later he heard the drone of the motor; Sanford signaled to him and he leaped wildly into the wagon and freedom. They swept down the driveway and headed down the road with powdery dust drifting thinly away behind. Chester, his teeth clenched, had not turned to look at the house. If he had, he would have seen a surprised trio issue out on the porch and stare after the car. It was a very pretty tableau com-

posed of Rolf, Lila and Helen, representing Amazement, Chagrin and a six-letter word meaning Relief, impersonated by Helen. For the first time in half an hour she was smiling. In the kitchen a negro boy christened Ned but called George for convenience, was preparing a second round of drinks, totally unaware of the fact that he was to inherit half the contents of a Gladstone bag within the next few days.

It was not until the station wagon had gained the security of the main road that Chester felt the constriction disappear from around his heart. He sat with relaxed muscles staring at the road. Sanford looked at him stealthily from time to time, wondering what had occasioned his agitated exit from the maison Weatherbee.

"What time is the next train to New York?" ventured Chester moodily at last.

"Well, the local from Boston's stopping here in about twenty minutes, mister," replied Sanford. "You change at Providence."

"Well, it's better than nothing." He searched through his pockets for a cigarette; he had left his behind, but Sanford, the very flower of courtesy

now, obligingly offered him one. Chester looked at him with a shade of remorse.

"You'll probably get hell for this when you get back to the house."

"Who, me?" Sanford was obviously amused. "Not on your life. They don't find chauffeurs like me lying around. Anyway, that Weatherbee bastard wouldn't have the nerve to fire ME."

"Which one do you mean?" inquired Chester.

"Either one, they're both a couple of slobs," spat Sanford. "In the first place I know too much about the old man and in the second place, where would they get a guy to drive their cars, work in the garden, run their errands and keep his mouth shut for ten bucks a month?" He was silent for a moment then added as an afterthought, "Say, mister, where's your bag?"

"In their bedroom up there," answered Chester. "And when you get back there you can have half of what's in it. Give the other half to the black boy. I don't want any souvenirs of *this* trip." Sanford, accustomed to the usual Weatherbee Christmas largesse of five dollars, regarded him in hushed awe.

"You're the only white man I ever saw around that house, mister," he said gratefully. "If I can ever do you a favor . . ." He broke off significantly, and Chester, remembering his previous career, took the implied hint. They were on the outskirts of the village; the chauffeur consulted his watch. "Plenty of time, you can get your ticket in the station over there. She'll be along in fifteen minutes or so." Chester jumped out of the station wagon at the entrance of the depot, pressed Sanford's outstretched hand and entered. The station wagon wheeled in a wide circle and swept off into the growing dusk.

Perched on a baggage truck in the deserted station, Chester picked at a splinter in his hand and reviewed the afternoon dully. It wasn't possible, this fantastic, absurd, giddy coincidence which had bogged him; his heart filled with bitterness at the thought of his own ingenuousness. Such bungling fatuity—never bothering to inquire Helen's last name. The only sop to his hurt pride was the thought that Lila at least had deceived him. Something nearer a feeling of despair than anything Chester had experienced in years en-

gulfed him. He slipped off his seat and reëntered the small station. The clerk behind the wicket grudgingly loaned him a comb and towel. Several minutes later, he sauntered out on the platform reflecting that, no matter what had happened in the past, he might as well turn a clean face toward the future. A distant whistle proclaimed the approach of the Boston local; its headlight appeared around a bend in the track and swiftly grew larger.

Down the track the engine paused for a moment and wheezed jets of steam into the stillness while a few passengers dismounted torpidly. Chester, grasping the handrail, fell back at the impact of a hurrying, bundle-laden figure. He stepped aside to let the woman pass. In the instant her eyes came level with his in the yellow light of the coaches, Chester understood once and for all the universal principle that the Deck is stacked and the Pea is under the other shell. At least they still remembered each other's names, which was one tribute to that evening in the Plumbers' and Mechanics' Bridge and Whist Club, or even to Judge Rosen's synthetic champagne.

"Wendy..." he faltered. Her eyes bulged. "Wendy, what—what—" He tottered against the side of the car, shorn of speech.

"But, Chester, this is insane! What are *you* doing here?" cried Wendy. Chester stared at her emptily, then suddenly seized her wrist and gripped it so hard she fought back a cry of pain. Her Boston shopping spread itself at her feet.

"Listen to me," began Chester violently and hurriedly, "what's your name, your last name?" He increased his pressure on her wrist.

"Weatherbee, you fool!" she moaned, attempting to squirm away. "Not that you ever thought of asking!" Chester laughed hoarsely.

"And you're the aunt," he said incoherently, "the hawk-nosed aunt who was going to chaperone the little vacation in the country..." The conductors' lanterns had already been swung and the train was slowly moving when a young man yanked himself aboard with a great cry. Chester Tattersall, tool of the Fates, went plunging blindly down the aisle of the smoker and fell in a senseless heap into the lap of a fat Greek gentleman named Nemesis.



CHAPTER XII

The man with the broken nose - The skeleton in the closet - We move to a house without closets - I decide to run the gamut but lose money - Temple drums - Incense and patchouli - The hand of the brotherhood - Exit the glorious rogue.

HAD it been humanly possible, Mr. Chester Tattersall of New York would have kicked down the brass door. For five and a half hours he had lashed up and down the steam cars, venting his spleen on train boys, kicking old ladies garbed in lavender and old lace in the shins, and frightening babies into gibbering terror. At Stamford, worn out, he dropped into a chair and gnawed his nails to the quick and back again. The calmness of exhaustion had quieted him by the time he staggered up the incline of Track 31 into the bosom

Retribution

of Grand Central and looked at the clock. Five minutes of twelve. He automatically bought a paper, threw it away, and wandered mistily into a cab. The driver, true to type, took him to Astoria and then berated Chester for not speaking clearly.

"Why the hell didn't you SAY Twelfth Street?" he shouted. "What d'ye think I am, a mind-reader?" Amid a volley of curses from Chester, they parted company finally before the Endocrine Arms. And now, having stood for five minutes jabbing the bell of the automatic elevator, he was on the verge of hysteria. Repeatedly he heard the elevator descend, pause for a moment while voices within the car were raised in argument, and rise again. Across the lobby mingled sounds of breaking glass, laughter and piano-playing spangled with boop-boop-a-doop-boop told the world that Cherry LaRue was entertaining. Chester gritted the grit in his teeth, gave the bell one last sickening punch and waited with distended nostrils. The small white light marked "In Use" glowed into red as the car stopped. His fingers crooked slowly, ready to sink into position on the throats of the

freight. Two young men stepped back at the menace of Chester in their path.

"What the confounded Christ do you think you've been doing with this elevator?" he bawled. The taller of the two, a lissom youth whose fair hair was brushed back from a high forehead, giggled.

"Why, we were just having a little ride," he said with a faint lisp. "Weren't we, Sterling?"

"Of course," the other hastened, surveying the intruder minutely with his vivid eyes. Chester, puzzled for a moment, took in the mascara, the white pearl stick-pin in the black tie, and the willowy figure in one glance.

"And who may you two big he-men be?" he inquired of the taller, noting the pale green handkerchief peeping from the cuff and the pleated waistband.

"I'm Sterling Value," offered the symphony in green. "This is my friend Stark Naked. Haven't I seen you somewhere before? I'm sure we've met." He leaned slightly nearer Chester but the latter seemed not to have heard him.

"Would you mind waltzing out of that ele-

vator?" growled Chester. "Or is it spoken for?"

"My goodness, don't get slimy just because we kept you waiting a minute!" put in Stark indignantly. "We heard this was a one-man elevator and we were only trying to see if it were true." His partner waved across Chester's shoulder; Cherry LaRue, her face slightly flushed and prettier than Chester had ever seen her, had opened the door of her apartment.

"Hello, Chester." There was something so genuinely convincing in her smile that he could not escape it. She leaned in the doorway while he catalogued the button earrings and the blue printed silk dress. "You might say hello at least." Behind her the piano banged out "St. James Infirmary" above hoarse ha-cha-chas.

"I do—I mean I am," blurted Chester. "I mean hello."

"Good," laughed Cherry. "A break for LaRue at last." He wondered why he had never seen those teeth gleam that way before.

"Do these belong to you?" He indicated the two youths who were whispering endearingly in each other's ears.

"Well, not exactly; they dropped in to-night and I let them stay. You know, I'm studying the facts of life and I'm only up to flowers."

"But what's that got to do with them?"

"Ah ah ah." Cherry shook her finger at Chester. "They're pansies." The blushing pair set up little squeals of dismay but Cherry cut them short. "Why don't you come in for a while, Chester? All my guests aren't like that. There are some really nice people here."

"Yes, a lot of norms," broke in Sterling in disgust. "It's getting so you meet them wherever you go!"

"It's terrible," complained Stark. "A man isn't safe on the streets after four in the morning." Chester hesitated, looked at Cherry again, and told his conscience that he could leave after one drink. By the time he had come nearer Cherry, he half-decided to make it two. Followed by the elevator chums, Cherry and Chester entered the apartment. The blur of smoke dissolved sufficiently for Chester to distinguish eight or ten forms draped about on chair, divan, floor and piano violating the most recent amendment. At the

piano a very fat young man was polishing off the last few verses of "Ace in the Hole." A tall girl with near-Titian hair caught at Chester's arm.

"Give me a swatch of your hair for my locket, sweetheart." Cherry pulled him away and guided him across outstretched legs, cushions and glasses into the kitchenette. A gallon jug of gin shared a white enameled table with seven or eight bottles of ginger ale. She rummaged about in a closet and produced a glass. Chester, balanced on the edge of the sink, lit a cigarette.

"Good Lord, I'm tired," he asserted finally, feeling some explanation for his rather disheveled condition necessary. Cherry stopped pouring his drink.

"If you'd rather go upstairs and go to bed," she said with the merest suggestion of bitterness, "I wouldn't—" He was sorry instantly that he had spoken.

"Don't say that, Cherry."

"Well, you know I've asked you down here before but you've always been funny about it. I realize that these people may not be—" Her voice trailed off into obvious meaning.

"I'm sorry about all that, Cherry. What I meant was that I've been riding in a train about eleven hours to-day and I'm up to here." Her mouth softened.

"We're all glad you're back, Chester." He could not see her face as she said it. "This will make you feel better." It did.

"I like your wine; can I have more?"

"You don't really like it, I know," Cherry corrected him. "Neither do I, but it's all I can afford." A chorus of voices blended loosely in song swelled in from the living room bearing in with it a gloomy gentleman with broad shoulders and stubby corn-colored hair.

"Chester, this is Tip Blinn. Tip, the star boarder, Mr. Tattersall."

"The eminent short story writer," added Mr. Blinn. "She always forgets that part, Mr. Tattersall. The one real diamond in a pack of heels and I blush unseen. Half the people out there to-night would think I was a cheesemonger for all she cares."

"I'm glad to hear you're not," replied Cherry

calmly. "What's the black brow for?" Blinn dismissed her languidly.

"What do you know about trouble?" he asked sadly. "Here's a mug throwing a brain away and she sits there fiddling while my feet burn."

"Have you tried agamensin?" asked Chester courteously.

"It's not that. I'm in a tough spot, damn it!"

"Every lining has a silver cloud, Tip," reminded Cherry.

"Clown on, baby, you should only have my worries some day," snarled Blinn. "Do you know what a ferris wheel is, Tattersall?"

"My father went broke playing one at Bradley's," said Chester proudly. Blinn shuddered and picked up the nearest drink.

"It's getting so no one's safe from you fast-patter boys," he remarked. "If you two foils can keep quiet for five minutes I'll tell you about it." He turned over a waste-basket and seated himself on it, staring sullenly into his glass. "Nine hundred smackers I'm supposed to get for the story and the deadline's ten o'clock in the morning. Nine hundred bucks and I don't know how to finish the

lousy thing. I could cry." His shoulders shook; Cherry patted him comfortingly on the back and handed him gin replacements.

"Once upon a time," he began with an effort, "there was a youth called Frisbie Hubbell living in Palfrey, Arkansas. His name was Laurence Grogan. I could change the name if you don't like it," he suggested wistfully. His listeners debated for a moment, then shook their heads. "Well, Laurence was a short-order cook in a lunch wagon. He was all alone in the world, nineteen years old, and had one hundred dollars in the bank. One day the Pony Express stopped at his lunch wagon and threw him a registered letter. A New York attorney informed him that his mother's uncle had died and named him sole heir. The latter also advised Laurence to apply at the attorney's office in New York for further particulars. The overjoyed heir drew his money from the bank, scoured his skillets, and set off for the bright lights. He rode into Penn Station with eighteen dollars left of which he spent two to be driven around the Pennsylvania Hotel three times. Carefully picking his way past derbied gentlemen anx-

ious to lease him Williamsburg Bridge and the Roerich Museum, Laurence made his way into the presence of the lawyer who had sent for him.

"'Mr. Grogan,' began the lawyer, 'your grand-uncle has left you a piece of property worth just one hundred thousand dollars. Let me be the first to congratulate you.' Laurence remembered dimly that the deceased had once owned an amusement park on Long Island; he listened attentively for the next words of the lawyer. 'Two years ago your grand-uncle's chief source of income, the Highlight Amusement Park, began to fail. There are not very modern conveniences out in Long Island, Mr. Grogan; plumbing, electricity, and amusements are unknown and the native counts himself happy who owns his own hut and the yak with which he toils in the paddy-fields for the rice which will keep him alive. Have a cigar.'

"'No, thank you.'

"'Smoking is a vicious habit,' observed the lawyer biting thoughtfully at the end of his panatela. 'However, to resume. Within eighteen months your uncle was forced to sell the park. To-day, where rollers once coasted and coons dodged base-

balls, waving fields of ginseng and potatoes wave side by side. In their midst stands the only thing your uncle was able to salvage from the wreck, the world's largest ferris wheel. That wheel, Mr. Grogan, is yours. Take good care of it, my boy, it is worth one hundred thousand dollars.'

" 'I think I will take the cash instead,' ventured Laurence somewhat timidly.

" 'I think you will not,' the lawyer told him icily. 'I have been trying to sell that ferris wheel for two years but the best offer so far was twelve dollars if I would consent to endorse the buyer's note in the Morris Plan. That ferris wheel is a white elephant on Long Island. It would be a gold mine down at Coney Island but it would cost thirty thousand dollars to get it there.'

" 'What do you suggest?' asked Laurence, after he had explained his limited resources to the lawyer.

" 'Just this,' replied the lawyer instantly. 'We will raffle it off at one dollar a chance.' When he explained further that he would bear the initial expenses, Laurence jumped at it. An advertising campaign was drawn up, a public relations counsel

retained, and within three weeks fifty-two thousand chances had been sold in North America alone. The prize was described as a valuable piece of property worth over a hundred thousand dollars. Three girls worked four days opening the mail which poured in. Several days later Laurence Grogan was Palfrey-bound with three thousand dollars in his new foolskin wallet."

"But if he sold fifty-two thousand chances," interrupted Chester, "why did he have only three thousand dollars?"

"Laurence and the lawyer were on a fifty-fifty basis," replied Blinn coldly. "Three thousand to the client and forty-nine to the attorney, in accordance with the usual legal practice."

"The ferris wheel, Tip, the ferris wheel," interrupted Cherry impatiently. "Who won it?"

"An Indian guide in the mountains of Saskatchewan," said Blinn from the depths of his fourth glass of bitters. "An Indian guide with three traps, a gun, and a blanket. Sitting up there on a hollow stump, he listened while the courier from the trading post explained in his native Lumbago what the letter from New York meant. Imagine

his embarrassment as he took in the situation. But," he paused darkly, "imagine mine too. That's as far as I could get with the story. Here's this clown resting on his canetta in Saskatchewan. He's got a ferris wheel in Long Island worth a hundred grand; he can't bring it into the Canadian Rockies with him, and the interpreter has intimated that he may even have to pay income tax on it. Worse than that, the Indian hardly knows what it is, there being no adequate word for 'ferris wheel' in Lumbago. That's what I'm up against and nine hundred shiny smackers shot to hell if I don't finish it by ten o'clock to-morrow morning." He rocked back and forth, his head in his hands. Cherry and Chester looked at him pityingly and knit their brows in concentration.

"Listen," said Chester suddenly. "A few days later the attorney back in New York receives a mysterious Indian client behind locked doors. A month afterward, down in Palfrey, Arkansas, Laurence Grogan buys a lottery ticket in a pool-room with one of his last five dollars. And your story ends with the Pony Express rider coming into the lunch wagon and handing him a letter."

"A letter? What about?" asked Blinn heavily.

"A letter informing him that he has just won first prize in the lottery, namely one handsome hundred thousand dollar ferris wheel, you dope!" concluded Chester. Blinn's eyes dilated. He sprang from his waste-basket.

"I've got it!" he shouted. "You mean the Indian got the lawyer to organize a second raffle!"

"You can't fox these short-story writers," Cherry told Chester. "Quick like a whip they're quick. They've certainly got the bee on the ball." But Blinn swept her aside impatiently.

"Tattersall," he gurgled, "if I can ever do anything for you—" He squeezed Chester's hand and plunged out, trembling with eagerness to resume work in his cork-walled study in the Ivory Tower far above Manhattan's glistening streets. The deserted duo heard the outside door slam above the cries of mangled feet as Author Blinn departed.

"He'll never forget you for that, Chester," assured Cherry. "You'll find him curled up on your door-mat mornings from now on."

"Like a trusty old watch-dog?"

"Like a trusty old watch-dog," repeated Cherry. "Except for the gin breath."

"Does that remind you of anything?" demanded Chester. They wiped out another drink and Chester started with surprise. His renegade right arm was around Cherry. Their lips brushed. Cherry laughed.

"Are my eyes bright with unshed tears, my sweet?" she asked. "Now you've got to marry me." A continued knocking on the door finally parted them. It was the tall girl with the pharmacy hair.

"We had to send those sweet men home, Cherry," she reported. "They were skipping around with their hands on their hips and knocked over one of your lamps." She examined Chester intently. "Let me meet you, little one. My name is Rose Quartz; are you interested?"

"Mostly in your name," confessed Chester. "What is it, Greek?"

"Good for you, baby, it is," said Miss Quartz leaning against the wall. "My mother's maiden name was Prophylaxis."

"It couldn't have been," decided Chester. "What are you, an Athenian? Or maybe a Spar-

tan? Show us the fox gnawing at your vitals."

"I'm neither," announced La Quartz, "I'm a Lesbian." Cherry eyed her unenthusiastically.

"Any number of my friends will tell you different," she said to Chester.

"My phone number is Goshawk 8000, kid," said Quartz putting an arm tentatively about Chester. "You remind me of my dead husband. Are you free evenings or are you another one of these damned night-school students?" Chester undid himself and escorted Cherry out into the living room. The tempo of the party had quickened. A flashy gentleman with a week's growth of beard had requisitioned a pair of lace curtains from the windows and was quivering to the ambitious "Dagger Dance" of the pianist at one end of the room; in a corner a heavily artificial brunette was coyly repulsing a New York University scholar flushed with wine and love. The usual crap game was in full swing, two of the guests were sparring like shipping clerks over a fancied insult, and three ladies had already received various propositions of a similar nature. Cherry darted toward an anæmic young man who was whittling ambitiously

on the leg of a chair with a clasp-knife. A seedy individual of the well-known dreamer type button-holed Chester and glared at him.

"Look at the unemployment problem!" he shouted. "What are we going to do about those riots? Are we going to stand by helpless and see all those policemen shot down in cool blood? And what about the traffic problem? And the housing problem? And the—"

"I'll tell you the answer," Chester interrupted him. "Do you want a way out of all your troubles?" The dreamer turned away angrily but Chester laid hold of his arm. "You just take six numbers—any numbers—and put them in your hat. Then put it on your head, take a subway to 148th Street and Grand Concourse, and turn the handle of the fire-box you'll find there. I guarantee your traffic problem, your housing problem and even your eating problem will be solved for at least three months." He saw Cherry beckoning to him from across the room and deserted the snarling dreamer.

"This is Edward Bulwinkle, Chester." She presented an underdone youth with tortoiseshell

glasses and a close bitten mustache. "He's an inventor."

"*The* inventor, you mean," corrected Mr. Bulwinkle importantly, seizing Chester's hand. "Mr. Tattersall, would you like to make a million dollars?" Chester shook his head. "Five hundred thousand? Fifty thousand? Five hundred dollars? Well, never mind, would you like to make five dollars?"

"Now you're talking," said Chester. "What's your proposition?"

"Just this," explained Mr. Bulwinkle hurriedly. "What is it this country needs most of all?"

"More waywardness among our young girls," replied Chester after a moment's thought. "Or less alert hotel clerks, to put it the other way."

"No, no." The inventor swept aside Chester's answers. "I'll tell you what this country needs; blue dandruff! Don't try to hide your head in the sand like an ostrich. Look the facts in the eye! Every third man in America wears a blue serge suit. Two out of three men are still using old-fashioned white dandruff on their shoulders. Do you want to go around looking like a snow

man? Haven't you felt the sneers behind your back, the sidelong glances at your luggage? Mr. Tattersall," Bulwinkle's voice shook with intensity, "I have invented a blue dandruff possessing all the virtues of the white product, absolutely invisible on a serge suit, wears like iron, can be cleaned by simply rinsing the suds, and cheap as dirt! A dandruff as delicate as the finest French talc and as wear-proof as steel wool! I have patents, plans, machines, backers! All I need is a little capital to advertise it, say fifty or sixty thousand dollars."

"I haven't any change," admitted Chester feeling about in his pockets. "But I'll give you a theme song if you ever advertise it over the radio."

"What's that?"

"The Blue Dandruff Waltz," said Chester. "Is that the only thing you ever invented?"

"I should say not," he retorted. "Didn't you ever hear of my machine to make counterfeit coins for pay bathrooms?"

"Bulwinkle!" Chester drew himself up. "That word—in front of a lady?"

"I mean pay toilets," corrected Bulwinkle peni-

tently. "Aw gee, they really are bathrooms, you know." His eyes flickered beneath Chester's stony stare and he retired blushing into a corner. Cherry cleared several casualties off a divan and drew Chester down beside her. He took one of the drinks she was holding and looked on with amazement as she drained her glass without pausing for breath.

"Aren't you afraid of the serpent that lurks in the bottle?"

"Frankly, no, dear," she replied, leaning toward him with her lips parted. "I love snakes. I grew up with one and I'd keep one here if they let me. Me and the Glauconidæ, the Uropeltidæ, and the Colubridæ—we're just one big family. Shall I tell you about Nancy?"

"Nancy?" asked Chester, placing his arm defensively about her.

"My pet rattler," explained Cherry. "Well, it all goes back to the time father began taking those long walks to get away from mother. One day, in a sylvan gland in the heart of the forest, father heard a piteous moan issuing from a nearby levine. To his surprise he found a snake with a thorn in

its foot, clasping its hands in anguish as it writhed with pain. A scholar and a gentleman, my father—his name was Androcles—extracted the thorn and went his way. Barely a half mile further on, he heard a peculiar rattling and turned to find that the snake was following him, wagging its rattles in friendly fashion. For a moment my father hesitated, then bent over and patted its head. The rattlesnake's eye glistened with gratitoom and he rubbed his coils on father's shoe. Twenty minutes later father returned to the house with the snake purring joyfully at his heels. We clapped our tiny hands excitedly over our new pet and gave it a saucer of fresh cream and a live chicken."

"Why a live chicken?" interposed Chester.

"We had no dead chickens," said Cherry. "We were very, very poor. . . . Anyway, in time Nancy became house-broken and learned how to help with the washing, mending and irony. She even took care of us children when mother was away week-ends. Well, one night we were all asleep when the most awful noise broke out downstairs in the living room. Father snatched his rifle from the rack and hurried down. Two burglars had broken in, shoved

all our silver into a sock, and were just leaving when Nancy detected them. Uttering a warning cry, she wrapped herself about their necks, thrust her head out the window and was rattling for the cops."

"My goodness, what devotion," murmured Chester.

"You said it, brother," remarked Cherry. "It was not for nothing that Moses erected a brazen serpent in the wilderness and the Greeks worshiped the snake at the temple of Æsculapius at Epidaurus. And who has not heard of the Apophis asp of the Egyptians or the Aji Dahaka of the Zoroastrians?" Chester listened open-mouthed to this display of learning.

"Ah, you are taken aback!" commented Cherry. "You marvel as the glib phrases roll from my tongue! You need not be envious; you too can charm and sway an audience, dominate a gathering! Why splutter? Easy graceful speech can be yours at no extra cost! Banish your blushes, flay your fears! This little volume in half morocco and India paper puts the information of the ages at your finger-tips! Give us your lunch hour each day

for two weeks and learn about the things that are interesting the smart people! In five days you will be surrounded by a coterie of admirers hanging on your very words! Have the right words for them to hang on! The gypsy world of society, art and letters can be yours also! Take your place amid the wits and the gourmets in the glittering modernistic salons of Europe! Rub shoulders with Picasso and clothes with Rinso! Do what you damn please, only stop tightening that earring. What do you think my ears are made of, sharkskin?" The fat young man who had been performing at the piano suddenly slid off the bench and went to sleep with his head on the pedals. His place was taken by the scientist Bulwinkle, who pounded aimlessly up and down the keyboard. A tremendous knocking at the door was drowned in the shrill hum of the buzzer. Cherry swore under her breath and threw open the door. Officer John Milington Synge, six feet two and one hundred and ninety-seven pounds of outraged majesty of the law, scowled at her in the doorway.

"What's going on here?" he bellowed. "Three complaints I got about the racket you're making!"

"Why, we were just making waffles, officer!" Cherry cried, pulling him in. "Rose, pour the officer a waffle!" The clink of the glass from the kitchenette heralded a fresh waffle for Office Synge, who had immediately taken off his coat, unbuckled his holster and given his blackjack to Bulwinkle to play with. The fat piano-player had awakened and was shining the officer's shield with a bit of chamois.

"Ginger ale with your waffle, sir?" inquired Chester.

"No, just put it in a paper cup," sighed Synge easing himself into a chair. "Oh, my poor feet. Believe me, boys, those pups certainly growl after kissing the asphalt eight hours a day." He drank deeply. "Sometimes I think I should have stayed at the seminary. This business is gone to hell. I used to get a double sawbuck from every speak on this beat, now I'm lucky to grab a fin apiece. There's no future in being a flatfooter."

"Give us 'The Minstrel Boy' to cheer up the officer, Danny," begged Cherry. The pianist laid aside the glittering shield and all present who were sufficiently sober joined in the chorus.

"Come on, everybody!" Officer Synge was on his feet, roaring out the words. They echoed and rebounded from the walls of the room.

*"The minstrel boy to the war has gone,
In the ranks of death you'll find him."*

Again a furious pounding on the door startled them into silence. The policeman squinted at the door and his face reddened.

"Is somebody trying to butt into this party?" he growled. "Wait a minute, let me answer that!" Three brother members of the force raised their eyebrows in astonishment at the sight of Synge *en deshabille*.

"Well, if it isn't O'Casey, Gogarty and Joyce!" cried the latter. "Come in, come in! Meet these nice people, boys! Bring some more waffles, good-looking!" the three constables threw their nightsticks under the piano and spread themselves on the divan. A dash of waffles and the quartette stepped to the piano.

"We'll show these people what close harmony is, men," said O'Casey. "Now, then, how about 'Mother Machree'?" Danny struck a deep chord

on the piano and the sweet singers of Precinct A went into the introduction with feeling. The reverberation of their voices was terrific; furniture trembled and a glass exploded on the floor. The curtain of smoke was so dense that it had attained weight and Chester's shoulders ached. As the troupe curtsied timidly to the applause and began "A Little Bit of Heaven," he decided to take refuge with Cherry in the kitchenette.

"They're very nice, Cherry," he commented. "But they *are* noisy." She sipped vaguely at her drink and smiled at him.

"You know, Chester," she said suddenly, "I had just about decided you were a so-and-so when I opened the door to-night and saw you in the lobby."

"I think I am," Chester told her gloomily, thinking dimly of Little Congo.

"No, you're not. I think you're a swell guy."

"Cherry—I—" He put his arms around her. "Cherry, I've been a dope. You—" The shriek of a siren cut into the noise like a knife. They stared blankly at each other, a smear of rouge slanting across Chester's nose. A second later the crash of

nightsticks at the door and hoarse shouts brought them into the other room.

"It's o.k., people!" O'Casey was quieting the frightened girls. "It's only the riot squad. Come on in, Corrigan, bring the boys with you! The stuff's in the kitchen, help yourselves!"

"Can you imagine the nerve of some people calling in about a little party like this?" boomed Corrigan. "Oh boy, we'll give them something to call in about! Put the Browning under the couch, Timmy." They clustered about the piano, seventeen to the man; O'Casey mounted a chair, held up his hand for silence, and gave the note for "Down by the Old Mill Stream."

"Hey, wait a minute!" called Corrigan. "Where do you get off leading this, O'Casey? Let Gogarty do it, he's the best tenor in the department." One of his men came forward, pushed O'Casey off the chair, and cleared his throat. But the first Gogarty interfered.

"Say, who's this clown?" he demanded of Corrigan. "I'm Gogarty!"

"You're crazy!" returned Corrigan. "Here, Milligan!" A small burly plain-clothesman who

had just entered came over. "Boys, this is Milligan of the Missing Persons Bureau. We'll find out who you are in a minute, copper. Identify him, Milligan." The detective put on a mask and circled swiftly about the first Gogarty.

"It's Laurence Tibbett, I think," he said finally. A cheer rose from his fellow members of the original quartette. O'Casey stepped forward.

"And me?" he asked with suppressed excitement.

"You're Jolson," reported Milligan without hesitation. The policeman clapped his hands delightedly.

"And me thinking all the time I was a lousy shommus!" he exulted. "Wait till the old woman hears this about her Denny!"

"That's Van and Schenck over there," added Milligan, indicating Joyce and Synge. The beaming patrolmen embraced each other happily, visioning promises of fat contracts, talking pictures, radio engagements.

"That'll be all, Milligan," dismissed Corrigan. "This'll be promotion for you. Report to-morrow in Arrochar, Staten Island, for night duty. And

now, men, we'll have another song. I'll have to ask some of you people to get out; the place is getting crowded." Chester plucked at Cherry's arm.

"Let's go up to my place, you can't do better than leave your apartment under police surveillance," he suggested. She nodded vigorously; speech was impossible in this clamor of voices, arguments, anecdote, song and splintering glass. Standing at the elevator entrance in the divinely fresh air of the lobby, Chester for the first time wondered about the hour.

"Five-thirty," said Cherry looking at her wrist-watch. "Mammy, I'm tired!" They yawned in unison as the car descended to the ground floor. Outside a slight mist was disappearing into the discouraging reality of dawn; the creak of milk-wagon wheels sounded in the deserted street. They had just entered the elevator when a squad car roared to the sidewalk. The door leaped open and seven policemen rushed in.

"Hey, you!" the leader shouted to Chester. "Where are they holding the glee club practice?" Cherry pointed to the door of her apartment without speaking as Chester started the elevator.

The stillness and comparative order of his apartment made it a bower of bliss after the confusion they had left. Chester opened a window and let the cool clean air filter into the studio. It was almost light and the clouds behind the water-tanks on Sixth Avenue loft buildings were edged with pink. He stood watching the sharp silhouette of buildings fade from black into somber gray.

"Look, Cherry," he whispered, gathering her into his arms. "The first faint flush of dawn—the threshold of a new day."

"It's exquisite," she said brokenly. "Oh, Chester—I—I know now what it is that I've been wanting. Chester, darling—"

"Yes, sweetheart?" His voice broke on the words.

"Could I have a cup of coffee, please?" She looked into his eyes then and knew. Together they looked into each other's eyes and saw there youth unafraid, undaunted, ready for high adventure and romance, flinging itself into the thick of the fray with a cup of coffee in its hand. Together they walked into the kitchen, these two lovers in

quest of happiness, while Chester sat down in the studio to smoke a cigarette. From the kitchen he heard Cherry's voice lifted in the last dreaming strains of "Cooking Buttons for the One I Love."

"We'll be very happy, darling, just you and I," murmured Chester as they nestled in an arm-chair and sipped their glasses of hot water. "From now on every girl I see wears thick eyeglasses and ground-gripper shoes. And we won't keep anything from each other, will we?"

"No, honey, I've got only one secret and I'll tell you that. You never knew I was married, did you?" Chester's blood congealed and he began to feel slightly shooty.

"And—and you're married now?" he managed to stammer.

"Oh, heavens, no; that was years ago! I eloped with a college boy but the marriage only lasted two weeks and I went back to the show business. Why, Chester, what on earth is the matter with you? Are you an epileptic?" He went rigid at her side and a peculiar glassy look crept into his eyes.

He arose slowly like an automaton and spoke, staring into space.

"Who—what was his name?"

"Why, what difference does it make?" Cherry shrugged her shoulders. "Oh well, if you must know, it was Rolf Weatherbee. He—Chester! What are you going to do?"

"I am going," Chester said very slowly and distinctly. "I am going to see how good this window is for leaping purposes. And when they scrape me together, kindly be sure that some undertaker whose name isn't Weatherbee plants me. You can have my marcasite earrings." He leaped. Cherry, frozen with horror, collapsed into her chair. Then she slowly ran her hand through her hair and looked at her watch.

"My word," she exclaimed to nobody in particular. "Almost seven o'clock! It's time I got some sleep." Before she could rise, Chester's head reappeared at the window.

"Cherry," he said in a subdued tone. "Oh, Cherry."

"Oh, it's you," observed Cherry, "I thought you were dead."

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"No, I was caught on a ledge. You didn't even care," he added reproachfully.

"But I do care, darling!" cried Cherry. "You can't know how I care!" He climbed back into the room. Somewhere between her chair and the window their lips met. The candle flared and then guttered out, the last petal fell from the rose on the bureau; but Cherry and Chester paid no heed. They had found their bluebird in the vale of heart's-desire.

THE END